A Philoſophical Enquiry

CONCERNING THE

CONNEXION

BETWEEN THE

MIRACLES and DOCTRINES

OF

JESUS CHRIST.

IN WHICH

MIRACLES are conſidered in a new Light; and it is proved that the Works JESUS CHRIST performed to evince the Truth of his Doctrines, are a natural, proper, and full Proof of them, in the ſtricteſt and moſt philoſophical Senſe of Proof or Evidence.

By *GEORGE TURNBULL*, LL.D.

The THIRD EDITION.

To which is added, An APPENDIX.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

UPON reviewing the first Edition of this ENQUIRY, I thought it proper to make some few changes and additions in order to render it a full and compleat demonstration of the Connexion between the *Doctrines* and *Works* of JESUS CHRIST: And I have now no more to say upon that subject. As for the other part promised, I only want some short time to put in order for the press, what I have long had by me upon that argument, so the Publick may expect to have it very soon.

BRITISH MUSEUM

THE PREFACE.

IF *a Preface or Apology be neceſſary in any caſe, it is certainly when a Letter to a Friend aſſumes a more publick character; and inſtead of a private miſſive, becomes an epiſtle to the world.*

By way of apology may it therefore ſuffice, That tho' the Author was adviſed, nay preſſed, to ſend this private letter to the preſs; yet what only prevailed with him to do it, was, that he ſeriouſly thought it might chance to convince ſome one doubter or other, of the truth of Chriſtianity: *And if it does, he is ſure of thanks for publiſhing it from ſuch; if it does not, ſome body will probably take the trouble to point out the lameneſs of the reaſoning; and ſo may perhaps give him new light, ſhew him his miſtake, or help him to a better argument; and in that caſe too he will have his reward; for truth is his ſearch and delight.*

Adver-

Advertiſement to this EDITION.

THIS ENQUIRY, with the APPENDIX, is offered by the Author to the conſideration of ſome late writers againſt Chriſtianity, to the *Moral Philoſopher* in particular; for he thinks it contains a ſatisfying anſwer to all that Author has ſaid about miracles, after many others. He begs leave only to aſk them one queſtion, and it is, Whether they think it probable that virtue would be more prevalent and univerſal in a ſtate where the genuine doctrines of Chriſtianity concerning our duties to GOD, ourſelves and our neighbours, and a future life, are believed; or in a ſtate where a future life is not believed, and moral duties are not inculcated or inforced from that belief? If this ſhould be ſaid to be a Query that does not belong to the queſtion about the truth or falſhood of the Chriſtian Religion, yet ſure it cannot be ſaid to be a Query that does not relate to the happineſs of mankind and human ſociety. As for the truth of Chriſtianity, it muſt come to the plain ſimple queſtion ſtated and anſwered in the following Eſſay, Whether the doctrine of JESUS CHRIST concerning a future ſtate, which is obviouſly a ſtrong motive to virtue, be not proved true by the Miracles which CHRIST wrought to prove it, in a way that is ſtrictly philoſophical and unexceptionable, at the ſame time that it is obvious to the meaneſt capacity; and that it is, muſt be admitted by all who allow experimental proof to be a good proof, or, in other words, ſamples to be ſamples of what they are ſamples; for the works of CHRIST are proper and adequate ſamples of his doctrine. The way in which Miracles are conſidered in this Eſſay is quite new, tho' very ſimple and obvious, and indeed demonſtrative; I have not met with it in any defence of Chriſtianity; and I am ſure it hath never been adverted to by any writer againſt Chriſtianity.

I think myſelf obliged to take notice, that the abridger of this Eſſay, in the *Bibliotheque Raiſonnée*, has no where miſtaken my meaning but in one place, *p.* 22. *But ſays a noble author*, &c. I don't ſay that Lord *Shafteſbury* intended to make an objection againſt Chriſtianity; I only give his words, and thence I take occaſion to expatiate at greater length upon the evidence which CHRIST gave of the truth of his doctrines, and to prove that as power can only be proved by ſamples, ſo honeſty can only be proved by ſamples, and therefore that CHRIST gave full proof of his doctrine by giving proper ſamples of his honeſt and good intention, as well as of all the power and knowledge he claimed.

April 10.
1726.

AN ENQUIRY, &c.

INTRODUCTION.

CHRISTIANITY, my Friend, has been attacked with ſo much zeal of late; that a meer ſtranger would certainly imagine, the happineſs of mankind depended upon being delivered from it. That it was a belief of the moſt fatal, pernicious influence; a diſmal enſlaving doctrine, which rendered it's diſciples incapable of living agreeably. For who could think that any one, who had the leaſt regard to his own private intereſt, or that of ſociety in general, would take pains to ruin the credit of a prevailing faith, which evidently tends to encourage virtue and to curb every vitious affection? Yet theſe who have ſo keenly diſputed the evidence of the Chriſtian Religion, never dared to find fault with the morals

it teaches. And hardly will any one adventure to ſay, "That the perſwaſion of a future "ſtate, is not a moſt powerful motive to the "practice of virtue and a good life: or that "mankind would be more virtuous without ſuch "an incitement."

To corrects the falſe doctrines and tenets of certain profeſſing Chriſtians, is indeed a good office. And the corruptions and abuſes that prevail in Churches, moſt undeſervedly called Chriſtian, ought to be expoſed in their proper colours. Or, in one word, if any Chriſtian teachers repreſent the doctrines of CHRIST in a falſe light; and put the ſtreſs of Religion and our ſalvation upon any thing, beſides the ſincere love and practice of every moral virtue, their error ought to be diſcovered and refuted. And our SAVIOUR himſelf has ſhewn us the way, by his manner of reaſoning with the Jewiſh Doctors. But this is the ſum of Chriſtianity: "That there "is a future ſtate of happineſs for the good: "and of puniſhments, for the vitious. The "ſincere and ſteady practice of virtue is every "where inculcated by our SAVIOUR and his A-"poſtles, as what only can recommend with "any advantage to the Divine favour and ap-"probation here, or hereafter." And conſequently to attack the true and genuine doctrine of JESUS CHRIST, is indeed to fight againſt a belief the moſt comfortable and beneficial.

* 'Tis certainly meer enthuſiaſm, to think that ſociety can ſubſiſt without a publick leading in religion. And if the Chriſtian religion

* *See Lord* Shaftsbury's *Eſſay upon* Enthuſiaſm.

is

is the beſt publick one that can be deviſed, is it friendly to undermine and deſtroy it? why diminiſh the obligations to virtue, which at leaſt are the moſt eaſily conceived by the vulgar, and are the fitteſt to work upon thoſe who cannot enquire, or philoſophize: but are powerfully ſtruck and over aw'd by the belief of miracles and inſpiration.

I have often had it in my head to publiſh, for the uſe of modern unbelievers, a diſſertation upon the religion of *Cicero*, that I have had by me ſome time; it is certainly fit to put them in mind, how that Academic examines the various opinions concerning Deity and providence; his way of treating the publick eſtabliſhed ſuperſtitions in his time; and his ſentiments * of thoſe philoſophers who endeavour'd to deſtroy the belief of immortality and future rewards and puniſhments, tho' it was no article of the publick religion. *Socrates*, and abundance of other examples, might very ſeaſonably be ſet before them. For my part, was I an unbeliever, I would look upon myſelf as obliged to confute ſuch falſe notions and repreſentations of the Chri-

* Quod ſi in hoc erro, quod animos hominum immortaleis eſſe credam, lubenter erro: nec mihi hunc errorem, quo delector, dum vivo, extorqueri volo: ſin mortuus (ut minuti philoſophi cenſent) non vereor ne hunc errorem meum mortui philoſophi irrideant. *Cic. de Senect.*

Polybius, *who was certainly one of the beſt judges of mankind and matters of government, obſerves, that the belief of a future ſtate is one of the greateſt reſtraints from villany; and therefore ſpeaking politically makes this remark, (I chooſe to give it in the words of* Caſaubon's *tranſlation)* " Idcirco mihi " videntur veteres nec temere, nec ſine gravi cauſa iſtas de Diis " opiniones, & de pœnis apud inferos, in vulgus induxiſſe. Con- " tra autem qui nunc vivunt temere ac ſine ratione illas rejicere. " οἰκῆ καὶ ἀλόγως ἐκβάλλειν ἀντά. *Lib.* 6.

ſtian doctrine, as tend to the hurt and ruin of true morals, and conſequently of ſociety and mankind; but at the ſame time to ſupport genuine Chriſtianity to the utmoſt of my power, for ſociety's ſake.

But I believe, and am to give you at preſent the reaſon of my belief, for you are curious, it ſeems, to know at full length, what I meant th'other day when I ſaid, "That the works of "CHRIST were natural proper ſamples of his "doctrines; and that I was not a little ſurpri-"ſed, none of the Apologiſts for Chriſtianity "had conſidered his miracles in that view; the "connection is ſo ſimple, and obvious."

To proceed regularly in this enquiry, one ought to conſider, what doctrines may be proved by works; and what doctrines cannot; or ſtand in no need of ſuch a confirmation.

SECT. I.

BEautiful and natural fables, parables, or allegories, are ſo in themſelves independently of any works the teacher may perform. And no works can prove an allegory, parable, or fable, to be natural and elegant, if it is not indeed ſo: if it's beauty and fitneſs does not diſcover itſelf to every diſcerning hearer or reader. For would it not be reckoned very odd and ridiculous for a Poet, who happened at the ſame time to be an able Phyſician, to appeal to the wonderful cures he performed, to prove his poetry elegant; or a Painter to prove his painting true and judicious.

'Tis

'Tis therefore evident, that works of the moſt extraordinary kind, can be of no other uſe, with regard to fables, allegories, and parables; except to excite the attention of the hearers; to gain authority to the teacher; get him a hearing; and make every body attend with due care; the vulgar eſpecially who ſtand much in need of inſtruction in that familiar inſinuating way, and yet are not to be moved without an extraordinary awakening.

The parables of our SAVIOUR juſtify themſelves abundantly; nor did he work miracles to prove their propriety and beauty.

SECT. II.

COmmon ſenſe is certainly ſufficient to teach thoſe who think of the matter with tolerable ſerioufneſs and attention, all the duties and offices of human life; all our obligations to GOD; and our fellow-creatures, all that is morally fit and binding. And there is no need of works, to prove that to be morally fit and obligatory, which common ſenſe and reaſon clearly ſhews to be ſo. Nor can any work on the other hand, prove that to be morally fit, and becoming, which common ſenſe and reaſon proves to be the reverſe. The moral fitneſs or unfitneſs of actions can only be deduced from the nature of the actions and agents; their conſtitution, ſituation, and relations. And therefore works of the moſt extraordinary nature can be of no further uſe, with regard to precepts and leſſons of morality, except to beget attention, and to make the ſpectators

ſtators and hearers reflect ſeriouſly upon that moral fitneſs, which common ſenſe clearly points out to every thinking perſon.

But if at any time common ſenſe is quite aſleep or buried; or if by the cunning of corrupt deſigning teachers, falſe notions of religion and virtue are become univerſal; and the vulgar eſpecially, who are eaſily miſled by crafty deceivers, can hardly be brought to attend to the wholſome inſtructions of undebauched pure ſenſe and reaſon; extraordinary works are certainly fit in ſuch a caſe; nay almoſt neceſſary to give ſufficient weight and Authority to a reformer; and to rouſe mankind to that attention which is neceſſary, in order to their being undeceived and ſoundly inſtructed. Their eyes muſt be opened, their ſleeping underſtandings awakened, their prejudices and falſe notions muſt be quite rooted out, before truth can enter into their minds with any ſucceſs, or produce any deſired change. And hardly can a taſk ſo difficult, be performed by a teacher with no more than ordinary ſkill or authority.

Such was the condition of mankind in general, of the Jews particularly, when our divine Reformer appeared in the world. And even his extraordinary, marvellous, works, ſcarcely were ſufficient to create attention to the moral doctrines and precepts he taught; which however are evidently in themſelves of the moſt excellent kind: in every reſpect wholſome, true, juſt, perfect. He did not work his miracles to prove the moral fitneſs; the reaſonableneſs and excellency of theſe; theſe prove themſelves ſufficiently: whoever will but attend to them muſt neceſſarily

neceſſarily diſcover their natural, immutable, eternal truth, and fitneſs.

SECT. III.

DOctrines that can be demonſtrated to be worthy of GOD and the divine perfections; and their oppoſites, or contraries, inconſiſtent with our natural and juſt conceptions of GOD and his moral qualities, are neceſſarily true. Thus, for inſtance, could it be proved that the immortality of human ſouls is worthy of GOD; and their mortality inconſiſtent with the true idea of GOD and the divine perfections; it would follow neceſſarily, that our ſouls are immortal; and no works, of whatever kind, could prove that they are mortal. Nor would there be upon that ſuppoſition, any need of works to ſhew that they are immortal. All that any works could do in that caſe would be, to excite attention to the neceſſary connexion of that doctrine, with the true notion of GOD and his moral attributes.

The argument holds equally good with regard to the reünion of our ſouls with bodies, or any other doctrine; ſuppoſing that the doctrine could be proved, by neceſſary conſequences, to be worthy of GOD, and it's contrary utterly repugnant to the divine nature and perfections. But however probable and likely theſe doctrines, of immortality and the reünion of our ſouls with bodies, may be in themſelves, upon ſeveral conſiderations; yet hardly will any one ſay, that their truth is demonſtrable. How theſe therefore may be proved to be true by works, is to be enquired.

SECT.

SECT. IV.

BUT it must also be observed, before we go further; that no works of whatever kind, however surprising or extraordinary, can prove reasonings to be just and conclusive which are evidently false; and solid, accurate reasonings stand firmly upon their own bottom; there is no need of any works to prove that they are so. There are indeed certain reasonings from facts or works; as from experiments, for instance, in physical philosophy. But in that case the facts, works, or experiments are the principles; the premisses, as the schools speak, from which the conclusions are inferred. And therefore with regard to such reasonings, the works may be said to prove the conclusion. But any other kind of reasoning which is offered as compleat in itself, distinctly from the works that are produced by the teacher, or in which the conclusion is deduced, not from the works but other principles, must not be judged by the works, but by comparing the conclusion with the principles from which it is drawn, examining first the truth of the principles, and next the connexion betwixt these and the conclusion inferred from them. In short, it is only when the works are the principles, the foundation, upon which the doctrine is built, that works can be taken into the consideration, when the question is about the justness of a reasoning or conclusion.

Thus

Thus when our SAVIOUR reaſons with the Jewiſh doctors concerning the Reſurrection, for inſtance, from this argument that GOD calls himſelf the * *God of Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob*; and that GOD is not the *God of the dead but of the living:* here is a concluſion drawn from a certain topic, which his works can neither prove to follow, nor not to follow. This and ſuch like reaſonings muſt be judged of by themſelves without any regard to his works †.

And now, my friend, you will underſtand, why t'other day, when I had not leiſure to explain my ſelf fully, I ſaid, that in proving the truth of the Chriſtian Religion, "it was neceſ-"ſary to diſtinguiſh betwixt the reaſonings of "our SAVIOUR and his apoſtles; and their "pure ſimple, poſitive, doctrines, for the "proof of which miracles were wrought ‖." Nothing can be more out of the way, than to ſay in the general, all the reaſonings of our SAVIOUR and his apoſtles muſt be good, and all his fables and allegories muſt be perfectly juſt and well choſen, becauſe he wrought ſuch and ſuch miracles. The reaſonings and the parables †† ſufficiently juſtify and prove themſelves. And the miracles only can be compared with theſe ſimple poſitive aſſertions, or doctrines, to prove the truth of which they were wrought; and which can be inferred from the

* Matth. xii.

† *See Biſhop* Tillotſon's *excellent ſermon upon that text, in which that reaſoning is ſet in a clear light.*

‖ Inter Apoſtolum & Doctorem, *to ſpeak with the learned.*

†† *One may truly ſay upon this head; Wiſdom will ever be juſtified of her children.*

works, as any other concluſion from it's principles.

What ſhould we think of a Mathematician, who pretended to give demonſtrations of his propoſitions; and after all argued thus; That his demonſtrations muſt be juſt, becauſe he could perform certain extraordinary feats in chymiſtry or medicine: Or of a moral philoſopher, that appealed to ſuch like marvellous productions to prove his moral ſcheme firmly built, every concluſion juſt, and the whole ſyſtem well connected. Whatever was thought of the works to be ſure, we would judge of the pretended reaſonings and demonſtrations by themſelves, without regard to the works.

" One general uſe however, of the works of " our SAVIOUR, with regard to the whole of " his leſſons and inſtructions, is obvious from " what has been ſaid. They ſerve to ſhew he " was a teacher that deſerved to be noticed; " they were fit to rouſe and excite his hearers " to give due attention to what he taught."

PART II.

SECT. I.

BUT now it is time to enter into the main queſtion; the connexion betwixt the Works and the Doctrines of JESUS CHRIST.

And in order to conceive diſtinctly; how, or in what caſe, works can prove a doctrine to be true; let us attend a little more particularly to the nature of thoſe reaſonings juſt now mentioned, which are deduced from facts, or experiments.

It is by experiment, that the natural philoſopher ſhews the properties of the air, for example, or of any other body. That is, the philoſopher ſhews certain effects which infer certain qualities: or in other words, he ſhews certain proper ſamples of the qualities he pretends the air, or any other body that he is reaſoning about, hath. Thus is it we know bodies gravitate, attract, that the air is ponderous and elaſtic. Thus it is, in one word, we come to the knowledge of the properties of any body, and of the general laws of matter and motion. The ſame way, if a philoſopher, a phyſician, an architect, a painter, or any artiſt, pretends to a certain

degree of ſkill or power; he muſt prove his claim by giving proper ſamples of that very degree of ſkill or power he profeſſes. 'Tis by proper ſamples or experiments only of power and knowledge, that we can be aſſured, one actually poſſeſſes a certain power or knowledge.

Juſt ſo it is only by ſamples or experiments, that we can judge of one's honeſty, benevolence, or good intention. We conclude a man honeſt and worthy of truſt and credit, becauſe he has given proof and evidence of his integrity and merit. It is from the works of the Supreme Being, that we infer his infinite wiſdom, power, and goodneſs; as from ſo many ſamples and experiments, by which we may ſafely judge of the whole. 'Tis thus we are ſatisfied about our own faculties and abilities natural or acquired. 'Tis thus we reaſon in a thouſand inſtances every day about ourſelves and others. It is in one word, from one's works only that we can infer his ability, ſkill, or power, of any kind or degree, as from proper ſamples or experiments of that power or quality; in the ſame way that it is from effects, that we conclude in natural philoſophy, that the air, or any body, poſſeſſes a certain quality; as from ſo many proper and analogous ſamples or experiments of that quality. And it is the ſame what the power claimed be, of what kind, ſort or degree; provided the power claimed be exemplified by proper analogous proportional ſamples or experiments.

If therefore certain doctrines of JESUS CHRIST evidently are, or can be, reduced to aſſertions of his having a certain degree of power or knowledge;

knowledge: his works may be a proper proof of theſe Doctrines; becauſe they may be proper ſamples or experiments of the power, or knowledge claimed by theſe aſſertions. For with regard to ſuch doctrines or aſſertions, all that can be required by way of proof is, ſamples anologous in kind, and proportioned in quantity or moment, to the power or knowledge claimed: juſt as in natural philoſophy, or the common reaſonings in life every day about the properties and qualities of things, or agents.

SECT. II.

IT remains therefore to be conſidered, what doctrines of our SAVIOUR can be taken in this light; or compared in this manner with his works.

And there are three doctrines of Chriſtianity that are evidently of this kind.

"The doctrine of future rewards and puniſh-
"ments.

"The doctrine of the reſurrection of the
"dead.

"The doctrine of the forgiveneſs of ſins."

But before we advance farther it is proper to take notice, that it is evident from what was ſaid before, of the proper proof of any claim to a certain degree of power or knowledge, that

it

it muſt be the ſame, whether theſe three doctrines are reduced to a claim of knowledge or a claim of power. The works will have the ſame relation to theſe doctrines, whether they are conſidered in the one way or the other. For a pretenſion to knowledge of a certain kind muſt be proved by ſamples of that kind; and a pretenſion to power of a certain kind muſt be proved by ſamples of that kind. The ſame ſamples therefore will prove the one, that prove the other, if the power and knowledge are of the ſame kind.

Either theſe three doctrines muſt be conſidered as a claim to knowledge in this way;

"I know certainly that the dead ſhall be "raiſed.

"I know certainly that there is a future im-"mortal State of rewards and puniſhments.

"I know certainly that ſins will be forgiven "upon a certain condition.

Or theſe doctrines muſt be conſidered as a claim to power in this way:

"I have power to raiſe the dead.

"I have power to forgive ſins.

"I have power to make happy or miſerable "in the life to come."

And which ever way they are taken, the queſtion about the works muſt come to the ſame thing.

thing. For in the one caſe it will be; whether they are ſamples of the knowledge pretended to; and in the other, whether they are ſamples of the power pretended to. But the power and knowledge being evidently of the ſame kind; their objects the ſame; the works that are of kind with the one, muſt be of kind with the other.

In which way then are theſe doctrines to be conſidered? As a claim to power certainly. For thus our SAVIOUR himſelf is repreſented in his hiſtory as always declaring theſe doctrines. "I will raiſe the dead; that all men may know "I have power to forgive ſins, *&c.*

But theſe three doctrines muſt be examined ſeverally, and compared with their ſamples.

SECT. III.

LET us firſt conſider the "Doctrine of the "reſurrection of the dead."

If our SAVIOUR had ſaid: "I certainly "know that the dead ſhall be raiſed:" What would have been the proper proof of his having that knowledge? He behoved certainly to have given inſtances of the poſſibility of a reſurrection from the dead; and of his having that knowledge, by actually raiſing from the dead. But obſerve how the doctrine runs; it is not an aſſertion of knowledge but of power: He does not ſay; "I know certainly the dead "ſhall be raiſed." But he aſſerts his power to raiſe

raiſe the dead: and always teaches that doctrine in theſe terms; "I will raiſe the dead; I will "give eternal life."

And what is the proper evidence when the claim runs in this ſtrain? The ſame as in the other caſe. It was neceſſary to give ſamples, or experiments, of this power he claimed. And accordingly he [a] raiſed from the dead; and gave power to his Apoſtles to raiſe from the [b] dead. And to put his pretenſions beyond all doubt, he himſelf ſubmitted to death, that he might give an inconteſtible proof of his being actually poſſeſſed of that power, by riſing himſelf from the dead [c] the third day, according to his own prediction [d].

To aſk then whether JESUS CHRIST gave a ſufficient or proper proof of his having power to raiſe the dead; is to aſk, whether raiſing the dead is a ſample of power to raiſe the dead.

All the Objections of certain Sceptics againſt the doctrine of a reſurrection from the dead, have been examined and ſufficiently anſwered by Dr *Samuel Clarke* [e], Mr *Locke* [f], and others; to whom I refer you. To ſay the truth, the difficulties moved againſt a reſurrection from the dead, do not touch that doctrine as it is de-

[a] Matth. xii. 25. Luke vii. 9, &c. John xi. 14, &c. Matth. iii. 24.
[b] Matth. xxviii. Matth. x. 18, &c. Mark xvi.
[c] Mark iii. 15. Luke x. 8, &c. Luke xxiv.
[d] Luke vii. 9, &c. Luke xii. 12, &c. John xx.
[e] *See the Doctor upon the* Being *and* Attributes.
[f] Locke's *Commentary on the* Epiſtles; *and Diſpute with Biſhop* Stillingfleet.

livered

livered by our SAVIOUR and his Apoſtles; but the chimerical additions to it of ſome Divines; who imagine the ſame particles of matter, which were united with the ſoul when it acted the bad or the good part, muſt likewiſe be ſharers in the rewards or the puniſhments; forgetting their own principle, the immateriality of our thinking part, and that matter is utterly inſenſible; nay incapable of being made, even by the Deity himſelf, to think, feel, or perceive.

SECT. IV.

BUT our SAVIOUR not only aſſerted his power * to raiſe from the dead: but to give us immortal, incorruptible † bodies and to make perfectly happy, or compleatly miſerable in the life to come.

And who are to be happy, and who are to be miſerable, according to his doctrine? The virtuous and regular are to be rewarded; the vitious and immoral are to be puniſhed. Every one is to be judged by his works, by his conduct, and approved or condemned accordingly.

Inſtinct, Reaſon, and the univerſal conſent of all nations and ages of the world, conjoin to render this doctrine probable, which our SAVIOUR has ſet beyond all doubt, by the ſamples he gave of his power to beſtow bleſſings, or inflict miſeries of every ſort. Conſider but his works in this light; and were they not all ſo many experiments or inſtances of this power? he made the

* John v. 20, &c. † 1 Cor. xv.

ignorant and ſimple wiſe in a moment: changed the tempers and diſpoſitions of men almoſt inſtantaneouſly: cured the moſt malign, inveterate, diſeaſes by a word of his mouth: delivered in the ſame inſtantaneous, wonderful, manner, from infirmities of every kind: and beſtowed upon whom he pleaſed, the moſt marvellous and ſurprizing gifts and talents *. His transfiguration was a plain ſpecimen and example of the glory and luſtre he could give to our bodies after the reſurrection. And all his works, in one word, were one continued ſeries of proper and analogous experiments, to prove his power to curſe or bleſs; baniſh diſeaſes and infirmities; beſtow bleſſings of every kind, moral or corporeal: make happy; compleatly happy, or compleatly wretched.

* Matth. xiv. 25, &c. Mark iv. 40, &c. Matth. ix 35, &c. Matth. xiv. 14, &c. Matth. xii 25, &c. Matth. xv. 21, &c. Matth. xx. 35, &c. Matth xxi. 14, &c. Luke xii. 12, &c. Luke x. 8, &c. Mark iii. 15.

SECT. V.

OUR SAVIOUR † alſo taught the forgiveneſs of ſins. And how did he prove his pretenſion to this power? By theſe very experiments and ſamples that he gave of his power to deliver from miſeries, and render happy. For what is it to forgive ſins? is it not to deliver from thoſe miſeries ſin juſtly merits; or to which it renders the ſinner obnoxious?

And accordingly he aſſerted his power to forgive ſins: but that all men might know he had

† Matth. xxviii. Mark xvi. Luke xxiv. John xx.

indeed

indeed that power; he ordered the lame, whoſe ſins he pronounced remitted and forgiven, to ariſe take up the couch and walk. † The dumb ſpoke; the deaf heard; the lame walked ſtrait and firmly: he cured all diſeaſes; and beſtowed health, ſtrength, and all ſorts of bleſſings: at his command alſo the dead aroſe; to prove that he could forgive ſins, or deliver the penitent from all the pains and miſeries his ſinful life had righteouſly deſerved.

Let us take notice however, how cautious he was of giving any encouragement to the wicked, by his doctrine of the forgiveneſs of ſins ‖. It was only to thoſe who ſeriouſly repented and reformed, that he gave the agreeable hopes of finding pardon. It was not to ſuch as continued in their ſins, in ſpight of frequent Remorſes and profeſſions of repentance: but to ſuch as really turned to the love and practice of virtue; and ſincerely forſook their wicked ways, in the habitual courſe of their lives and practice.

And therefore we find that where there was no Faith, he refuſed to work cures. Where there was no Faith: that is, where he found not that ſincere, unprejudiced; that pliable, docile temper, that is neceſſary in order to reformation, or receiving wholeſome inſtruction: but on the contrary, obſtinacy, ſtubbornneſs, malignity of diſpoſition, and every bad quality. That this is the meaning is plain, becauſe he upbraids them for their malice and blind obſtinacy; the hardneſs of their hearts; and calls them children of

† Matth. ix. 5, &c. Mark ii. 10. Luke v. 20, &c. Mark xiii. 11, &c.

‖ Matth. xiii. 58, &c.

the Devil ſometimes; a phraſe that ſounds harſh in our tongue; but is well known by thoſe who are ſkill'd in the original languages, to mean no more, but that they hated the light and loved darkneſs, becauſe their works were evil, as he himſelf ſpeaks at other times.

Thus in the whole of his conduct, he carefully ſhunned, by a promiſcuous beſtowal of his favours and bleſſings, to give any handle to the moſt terrible, pernicious abuſe of his doctrine concerning the forgiveneſs of ſins; as if in conſequence of it, *men might ſin that grace might the more abound* †. And at the ſame time gave full aſſurance of his power to deliver ſincere reformers, from the juſt demerits of their former evil practices; if an infinity of inſtances of power to deliver from all ſorts of pains and miſeries, and to confer all kinds of bleſſings, are proper and adequate ſamples of a power to curſe and bleſs, make happy or miſerable.

† Luke vii. 9, &c. Luke x. 9, &c. John xi. 14, &c. Matth. x. 19, &c. Matth. viii. 42, &c.

SECT. VI.

ADD to theſe three, the promiſe of aſſiſtance to all thoſe who being convinced of the truth of our SAVIOUR's doctrine and pretenſion; ſeriouſly ſet themſelves to reform every evil habit; and to improve daily in virtue and goodneſs.

It was neceſſary that the Apoſtles, who were, after our SAVIOUR's aſcenſion, to preach and promulgate his doctrine, ſhould have an extra-

ordinary

ordinary assistance *; the gift of tongues; the power of healing diseases; and of raising from the dead. And accordingly we have already seen that all necessary power and assistance was actually given to them. So that the effusion of gifts upon them at *Pentecoste*; their bold and undaunted perseverance in spight of all opposition; their heroic sufferings; and all the extraordinary works they performed; were an infringible proof and confirmation of our SAVIOUR's ability to bestow every virtue, every quality, every degree of power: and at the same time of his veracity and faithfulness, that he would not fail to fulfil all that he had promised. And consequently were an indisputable argument of the truth of all his doctrines; of his whole claim. A proper proof in particular of his being able to give the assistance he hath promised to Christians.

† He proffers his spirit to them who ask it. He hath said that if Christians are not remiss and slothful, but give all due pains on their part; that their endeavours shall be successful; that they should feel their irregular appetites and passions weaken apace; and the good ones gain new life and vigour every day. And more especially that they should find proper aid in time of trial; an extraordinary assistance to counterbalance the extraordinary attacks their virtue might suffer in certain circumstances from the side of pleasure and it's enchantments; or distress and it's terrors. And seeing he accom-

* *See the texts already cited. And the whole history of the Acts of the Apostles is full of samples and proofs to this purpose.*

† *He hath promised in innumerable places to* Give his Spirit to those who ask it.

plished

pliſhed to the full, what he promiſed to his Apoſtles; why ſhould we doubt of his ability, or good-will to do all he undertook? He who did the greater, can he not, will he not, do the leſs? In ſhort, all the courage, wiſdom, ſincerity, and ſteadineſs of the Apoſtles; all their gifts, talents, and works, are, in the nature of things, the fitteſt *Specimens* that can poſſibly be imagined, of our SAVIOUR's capacity to make good all he promiſed. And that no diſtance of time or place could make any difference, or alteration, with regard to his will or power. Samples of power to beſtow a certain quality, or bleſſing, are certainly a proof of power to beſtow it.

SECT. VII.

I Have not time to give you an exact hiſtory or detail of the works of our SAVIOUR recorded in the goſpels; nor is it neceſſary: after theſe hints it will be eaſy, in reading over the goſpels, to refer the works narrated there, to theſe doctrines.

But, ſays a noble author *, "Signs of power "may prove power, but cannot prove honeſty, "or create truſt.

And to ſay the Truth, it was this way of ſpeaking about miracles, that firſt gave me the hint of conſidering the miracles of our SAVIOUR as ſamples of his pretended power. But in anſwer

* *The Earl of* Shaftsbury *ſomewhere in his* Moral Rhapſody.

to this, let us conſider how honeſty and good intention can only be aſcertained. To be ſure it muſt ſhew itſelf by an uniform untainted conduct and behaviour; by a continued courſe of honeſt and benevolent deeds; by a ſeries uninterrupted of ſamples of goodneſs and ſincerity. And was not the whole of our SAVIOUR's conduct the fitteſt that can be imagined to gain him credit in this way? what ground did he ever give to ſuſpect his fidelity, or call his truth and honeſty in queſtion? Were not theſe very works †, that proved his power at the ſame time, ſo many irrefragable evidences of his goodneſs, ſincerity, and benevolent honeſt intention? It was neceſſary to give ſome examples of his power to curſe as well as to bleſs. For ſuch is the nature of the common herd of mankind, that one inſtance of ſuffering makes more impreſſion upon their weak and fearful minds, than a thouſand examples of happineſs. But he choſe to ſhew his power to inflict pains and miſeries to blaſt and curſe by ſuch examples as might ſerve the purpoſe ſufficiently, and yet do very little miſchief: as in curſing the fig-tree ‖, and ſending the Devils into the ſwine *. He delighted not in curſing, but in bleſſing; he rejoiced in works of mercy and benevolence; and went about continually doing good. But there is the leſs reaſon to inſiſt upon this article, that even thoſe who have called him an impoſtor never adventured to

† *I need not put you in mind upon this head, that by Devils are to be underſtood violent terrible maladies; for that has often been made plain, and is now, I believe, generally agreed on. And I ſhall be obliged to treat of that affair at more length in the ſecond part of this* Enquiry: *when I come to conſider the facts, and their evidence.*

‖ Matth. iv. 19. Mark xi. 14, &c. * Mark v. 13, &c.

charge

charge him with malice, or any bad miſchievous deſign: but on the contrary, have been obliged to acknowledge, that he gave all the poſſible marks of a good, generous, and well-diſpoſed Teacher of the ſoundeſt morals.

In judging however of our SAVIOUR's pretenſion; his conduct, and the evidences that he gave of his honeſty, and ſincere good diſpoſition, muſt certainly be taken into the account. He himſelf tells his diſciples, that they were not to truſt to miracles only; becauſe not only might falſe teachers *work miracles*, but there ſhould actually come after him *falſe Chriſts* †, falſe prophets, working miracles; but that, together with the miracles they were to conſider the doctrine and the conduct of pretended extraordinary Teachers: to judge of the *tree by it's fruit* ‖.

† Math. xxiv. 24 Mark xiii. 22. ‖ Matth. xii. 33.

SECT. VIII.

BUT having conſidered the ſamples JESUS CHRIST gave of the power he claimed by his doctrines: it muſt be obſerved next, that he pretended to a divine commiſſion to teach theſe doctrines: and by them to encourage and excite to the practice of virtue, and to diſcourage ſin and vice.

And with regard to his pretended miſſion; it is evident, that if the particular doctrines, that is, the particular aſſertions of power, are ſufficiently juſtified and proved by proper ſamples; the truth of the miſſion follows in courſe.

For

For what reaſon can there poſſibly be to doubt of the miſſion, when the particular power the miſſionary claims, as miſſionary, is ſufficiently aſcertained by proper ſamples?

But beſides, the whole ſeries of the miracles of JESUS CHRIST may be juſtly conſidered as one continued proof of the general pretenſion to a miſſion: as one continued proof that, as he aſſerted, all power * was given unto him of GOD who ſent him. For by his works he ſhewed, that he had an univerſal command of nature: a power that nothing could controul. † The ſeas, the winds, all the elements, every thing above or below obeyed his all-commanding voice. His works therefore in this caſe are ſtill proper adequate ſamples.

In fine, a divine miſſion can be nothing elſe, but a certain degree of power or knowledge given of GOD; or ordered by GOD to be exerted for a certain end: ſuch as the "aſcer-"taining the truth of certain doctrines." And therefore ſamples or experiments of power and knowledge analagous to the doctrines preached: or to the power and knowledge claimed; and proportioned likewiſe in quantity or number; are a proper proof of a divine miſſion; if power or knowledge can in any caſe be evidenced by ſamples, or experiments. And ſure, as has been ſaid, there can be no other way of ſhewing power, or knowledge, but by giving certain ſpecimens of it.

But to leave no room for doubt or ſcepticiſm, let us enquire yet more particularly what is neceſſary to prove a miſſion.

* Mark iv. 39, &c. † Ibid. vi. 11.

And when one pretends to a miſſion, there are three things requiſite to compleat his credentials. "The doctrines he teaches muſt be

I. "of importance; ſuch as it concerns mankind "much to be aſſured of; and have an evident "connexion with our peace and happineſs, and "tendency to promote virtue and piety."

And ſuch certainly are the doctrines which JESUS CHRIST taught: they are ſuch as the wiſe in all ages have earneſtly wiſhed to be aſſured of by a proper evidence. They are, in one word, the only doctrines that have any connexion with virtue * and piety; or the happineſs of mankind, which natural reaſon is in the dark about, and cannot aſcertain beyond all doubt.

"Next the miſſionary muſt behave himſelf in "ſuch a manner, as that we may have ſufficient

II. "reaſon, from his conduct, to truſt and put "full confidence in him."

And ſuch certainly was the whole of our SAVIOUR's conduct and behaviour; that either we may ſafely rely upon his word, and believe in his honeſty; or no marks, no ſamples of goodneſs, ſincerity, and faithfulneſs, are ſufficient to create truſt.

"Laſt of all, the pretended miſſionary muſt "give a proper and full evidence, that he

III. "really is poſſeſſed of any degree of power he "claims; and of the knowledge that is neceſſa-

* *Well might our Saviour ſay,* That ſuch who know the will of GOD, and do it; muſt own and acknowledge his doctrines to be of GOD.

"ry

" ry to render him capable of aſcertaining theſe
" doctrines to us which he aſſerts and teaches."

And have we not already found that he gave proper and adequate ſamples of the power he claimed by his doctrines? and do not all his works ſhew that univerſal knowledge of nature, and the government of the world; which is ſufficient to put his capacity to teach us the doctrines he taught beyond all controverſy? Who is ſufficient to inſtruct us, if he who gave ſamples of ſuch extraordinary knowledge was not? What greater degree of knowledge can we require in an inſtructor; or what other ſamples of the knowledge requiſite to inſtruct us? conſider him as pretending to come from GOD, to tell us that he had power given unto him of GOD *to raiſe the dead* †, *to forgive ſins*, and to make the virtuous happy, and the wicked miſerable, in the life to come. And as this was indeed his pretenſion; ſo we have already ſeen that his works were proper and proportioned ſamples of his right to claim ſuch power. Conſider him as pretending to come from GOD, to teach mankind that there will be a future ſtate, and a reſurrection of the dead; and that thoſe who repent and reform their lives, will be forgiven and made happy in a future life; but that the impenitent, and ſuch as continue to lead vitious and diſorderly lives, will be puniſhed in that after-life. And ſtill his works are proper and adequate experiments, that he had the knowledge requiſite to give us this information. For he ſhewed that the dead could be raiſed; that he knew how to raiſe the dead; and could

† John v. 19, &c. Matth. xi. 27.

actually raiſe them; that he could make happy or miſerable in any degree; that he could forgive ſins; or give full and compleat evidence when ſins were forgiven; becauſe he could deliver thoſe whoſe ſins he pronounced forgiven, from any ſorts of pains or miſeries, to which ſin renders obnoxious. In like manner he proffers aſſiſtance to the virtuous; and at the ſame time ſhewed his ability to confer every good quality when at a diſtance, as well as when preſent.

To conclude, if we abſtract from the hiſtory of our SAVIOUR, and inquire with our ſelves what would be a full and compleat evidence of a miſſion from GOD to teach; it is not difficult to find out what the evidence muſt be. For we know what doctrines of importance, with regard to GOD and ourſelves, natural reaſon is not able to ſatisfy us fully about.

We have ſo much knowledge of GOD, as to be able to determine what doctrines he would inſtruct us in, by an extraordinary miſſionary; if he ſhould ever condeſcend to teach us in that manner. Theſe very doctrines to be ſure, which have a connexion with virtue and piety, that natural reaſon is not able to deduce certainly from any principles; and ſuch are the doctrines which JESUS CHRIST taught. And as for what regards teſtimony, we all know the evidence that is requiſite to render it credible and worthy of our reception. All, to be ſure, that can be demanded is, that there be good ground to truſt our informer as to his honeſty; and next, that he give ſufficient ſamples of the kind of knowledge he pretends to, or that is neceſſary in order to his giving us ſuch and ſuch information:

ſamples

ſamples analogous in kind, and proportioned to the degree of knowledge he claims, by pretending to inform us of certain truths. We muſt reaſon concerning the proper credentials, or evidence of teſtimony, in every caſe the ſame way: in this juſt as in any other.

Having therefore ſhewed that our SAVIOUR gave ſamples of his ſincerity and honeſt deſign; and at the ſame time adequate ſamples of the power and knowledge he pretended to; it follows neceſſarily, that there is all the reaſon in the world to believe in him, and give him full credit.

SECT. VIII.

AND is this then, perhaps you'll ſay, the whole of Chriſtianity? Yes it is; and a noble and perfect ſyſtem indeed it is, containing all the encouragements that can be thought of, or deſired, to virtue, piety, and goodneſs, the love of GOD and our fellow-creatures; which common reaſon ſufficiently tells us, if we would but hearken to it's dictates, is the whole duty of man.

Theſe doctrines above explained are clearly inſiſted upon by our SAVIOUR and his Apoſtles ‖. Theſe doctrines are ever and ever inſiſted upon by them, as the chief; as the only doctrines of conſequence they had to inſtruct us in †. Theſe doctrines

‖ John v. 2. —vi. 38, 44. —xiii. 44. —xiv. 33. Acts ii. 29. —iii. 26. —iv. 10. —x. 42. —xviii. 30. 1 Cor. xv.

† *See the texts cited in the foregoing pages.*

are ever inculcated by them, as motives to the practice of virtue. Theſe are the doctrines the beſt of the ancient philoſophers, would have rejoiced to have found ſufficient evidence to believe. And theſe doctrines being aſcertained, we are fully inſtructed in every thing that relates to virtue, or this life, or the life to come, that it concerns us to know. Had I not then good reaſon to ſay in the beginning of this letter, my friend, "That "the doctrine of a future ſtate is the ſum of "Chriſtianity." For the doctrines abovementioned are eaſily reducible to this one propoſition, "That the vitious are to be puniſhed in "the life to come; and the virtuous to be aſ-"ſiſted in their ſerious endeavours here; and "made perfect in virtue and happineſs here-"after." With this ſingle additional circumſtance, "That after our ſouls have been for "ſome time ſeparated from their bodies, they "are to be again embodied." There is nothing in the chriſtian doctrine that has not a relation to a future ſtate, as it's main end and ſcope *. And conſequently to fight againſt Chriſtianity, is to fight againſt a belief the moſt chearing and comfortable; the moſt ſtrong and powerful perſuaſive to a virtuous and good converſation.

There are ſeveral obſcure places, eſpecially in the epiſtles of the Apoſtles, about the interpretation of which the learned Criticks and Divines have been much divided in all the after-ages of Chriſtianity. But that is argument enough,

* *The Apoſtles in all their diſcourſes, and the Fathers in all their apologies, inſiſt upon the reſurrection as the principal doctrine of Chriſtianity: the great end and purpoſe of chriſtian preaching.*

that

that Chriſtians are not obliged to know their meaning. That can never be ſaid to be revealed, which is not made plain; or which remains liable to various and uncertain interpretation. Our ſalvation cannot poſſibly depend upon that which it is difficult, not to ſay impoſſible, even for much learning to determine. Not to mention that common ſenſe and reaſon tells plainly and indiſputably, that it is only virtue and goodneſs that can recommend, or make acceptable to GOD, who is all virtue, all reaſon, all goodneſs. And indeed to imagine otherwiſe, is to ſuppoſe that the moſt uſeful quality is not the moſt valuable: or that GOD, who is infinite wiſdom, doth not delight moſt in that which is of all other qualities the moſt excellent and deſerving *.

We are called by JESUS CHRIST to believe in him: that is, to believe he really had a miſſion to inculcate virtue by theſe doctrines he taught; and really had the power he claimed by theſe doctrines: that thus believing in him we might fall in love with virtue, and ſeek earneſtly for glory, honour, and immortality, by a ſincere and firm adherence to virtue, in ſpite of all temptations and ſeducements. To believe in him is nothing elſe than to believe the authority he had to excite to virtue and piety by his doctrines; his power to forgive ſins and raiſe the dead; and to aſſiſt and proſper our earneſt aims in the purſuit and ſtudy of virtue. And this faith can be of no value or merit, unleſs it

* *If there is a GOD; and that there is, all nature cries aloud, he muſt delight in virtue. Virtue is the perfection of the human nature.*

produces

produces good fruits; unleſs the end of his teaching is gained, which is to perſwade to live a natural, manly, and virtuous life; in every circumſtance to behave as becometh a thinking, reaſonable being; to love GOD; and, like him, to delight in doing good. Without ſuch works faith is dead †.

A great many queſtions are aſked and diſputed, about the ſtate of thoſe who have not heard of CHRIST. But the anſwer to them all is obvious. Thoſe who have not heard of CHRIST, cannot believe: but thoſe have yet a law within themſelves, teaching them their duty; the duty CHRIST taught; the whole duty of man ‖.

That the doctrine of CHRIST however is not more generally known throughout the world, is the fault of Chriſtians, who take not the right method to propagate it; but have, the greater part, ever done their utmoſt, either fooliſhly or wickedly, to marr it's progreſs. The Chriſtian Religion can only be propagated in the rational way of argument and perſuaſion; and it is the integrity and purity of the lives of profeſſing chriſtians; and their moderation and humanity towards unbelievers, that ever will have the greateſt influence to recommend Chriſtianity, and promote the belief and love of it. The temper and ſpirit which true and genuine Chriſtianity inſpires, is a ſpirit of meekneſs and gentleneſs, charity and compaſſion; *ſlow to* * *wrath*; *ready to forgive*; *prompt to good works*. And

† James iii. 20. ‖ *This is the Apoſtle* Paul's *account of the matter*, Rom. ii.

* James iv. 1 Cor. xiii.

where

where this temper is not found, there is not the ſame ſpirit that was in CHRIST and his Apoſtles; nor the diſpoſition that only can render agreeable to GOD who ſent him into the world to teach humility, and benevolence, and to reprove every vitious affection; to exemplify all the moral virtues in his life and conduct; as well as to give the ſtrongeſt inducements to the practice of them by his doctrines.

SECT. IX.

BUT by this time, my friend, I am afraid you begin to dread a ſermon. And therefore to return to the argument:

If it is allowed, as it muſt certainly be, that the doctrines ſo often repeated are the chief doctrines of Chriſtianity; Chriſtianity carries the ſame evidence along with it, that any doctrine does, which is confirmed by the plaineſt, the moſt proper, or analogous experiments.

"The works of JESUS CHRIST conſidered "as ſamples of the power he claimed, are not "*Diſperates*, with regard to his doctrines, as "*Spinoſa* alledges miracles muſt be with regard "to doctrines."

It is true, miracles, when conſidered in a general abſtract view, do not appear to have any relation to doctrines: nothing at firſt ſight can ſeem more diſtinct or remote the one from the other. And therefore it is commonly objected againſt the proof offered from miracles: what can miracles have to do in the caſe; miracles

may prove power; but what is that to the truth of doctrines? But take the doctrines and the works of CHRIST, and compare them together; and the relation and connexion is obvious. Samples of power to raise the dead, prove the power to raise the dead: and samples of power to make happy, prove the power to make happy: in the same way that samples of gravity prove gravity; or samples of elasticity prove elasticity; or that samples of skill in any sort, prove skill of that sort. There is the same relation, in one word, betwixt the doctrines of JESUS CHRIST and his works, that there is betwixt any experiment, and the conclusion that naturally follows from it.

"Nor are the works of JESUS CHRIST arguments *ad ignorantiam*, (as the same author says) miracles must ever be." For the works of JESUS CHRIST, however much above our comprehension, bear a plain relation to his doctrines; and it is only the truth of the facts or samples, and their relation to the doctrine, that we are concerned to understand. That can never be said to be a proof *ad ignorantiam*, the connexion of which with the thing proved, or the conclusion inferred, is clearly perceived.

The works of JESUS CHRIST are not arguments of power, we know not what: they are arguments of the very power he pretended to; because samples of that very power. Arguments of his power to raise the dead; forgive sins; make happy or miserable. Arguments of an universal knowledge of nature; and unlimited authority over all things; arguments, in short, of

of the whole of his pretenſion; becauſe ſamples of all he pretended to.

Tho' we underſtand not the nature of that power which raiſes the dead; tho' the raiſing the dead be a work above our ability and comprehenſion; yet a ſample of power to raiſe the dead, proves that power; and the connexion betwixt the ſample and the power pretended to is not above our comprehenſion, but is eaſily underſtood. Attraction, ſay all the philoſophers, is above our comprehenſion: they cannot explain how bodies attract: but experience or ſamples certainly prove that there is attraction. And proper experiments or ſamples, muſt equally prove the power of raiſing the dead, tho' we do not underſtand, or cannot explain, that power.

But becauſe there is ſo much controverſy about that common diſtinction betwixt things above our reaſon, and things contrary to our reaſon, it may not be amiſs, on this occaſion to ſay ſomething about it.

And an example taken from natural philoſophy will ſoon clear the matter: Attraction can only be known by experience, and ſamples abundantly prove it. But it is above our reaſon or comprehenſion? What is the meaning of that? why it is only to ſay, that a thouſand queſtions may be aſk'd about it, to which no anſwer can be given; becauſe we know not enough about it, to anſwer them. We know that it is; and ſome of the laws according to which it produces it's effects: And that is all we know of it. And our not being able to give ſatisfying anſwers to

other queſtions, that may be aſked about it, only proves that there is a great deal relating to it, we do not know.

In the ſame manner a thouſand queſtions may be aſk'd about raiſing the dead, which we can't anſwer. A ſample however proves the poſſibility: and many ſamples as certainly prove the power to raiſe the dead; as ſamples of attraction prove attraction. Nor indeed can the power of raiſing the dead, be ſaid to be above our comprehenſion in any ſenſe, that attraction, and twenty other properties of bodies, may not be ſaid to be above our comprehenſion. What we clearly ſee to be abſurd, we clearly ſee to be ſo; but there is a great difference betwixt ſeeing a thing to be abſurd, and not knowing every thing that belongs to it; or not being able to anſwer every queſtion that may be aſked concerning it. Some ſeem however to confound inſolvable queſtions about a truth, with inſolvable or invincible objections againſt a truth. And becauſe there may be difficult, nay unanſwerable, queſtions relating to a known truth; maintain there may be inſolvable objections againſt a known truth. But * an inſolvable objection againſt a truth, is an argument *ad abſurdum* againſt a truth, or a proof that a known truth cannot poſſibly be true. Thoſe who delight in ſophiſtry and grubbing, may perplex the ignorant or incautious: and no ſcience has eſcaped this puzzling, perplexing art. But by a fatal calamity, none has ſuffer'd more than Divinity. Yet when the artful terms of the ſchools, intro-

* *It is worth while to read a diſcourſe of Mr* Leibnitz, de Fide & Ratione, *in which this queſtion is handled.*

duced

duced on purpoſe to darken and embroil the cleareſt truths, and to be an everlaſting ſource of controverſy and wrangling; when all artful, captious, equivocal terms are thrown aſide; and truths are expreſſed in common, ſimple, plain language, the ſophiſtry is eaſily ſeen thro', and it's miſts evaniſh *.

This way of conſidering the works of JESUS CHRIST, as ſamples of his doctrines, makes the connexion betwixt his works and his doctines obvious to every capacity. Becauſe we all reaſon in this way every day, about a thouſand different things: thus the meaneſt labourer of the ground, or pooreſt mechanick, muſt argue frequently: we judge of friends and enemies by ſamples; by ſamples and experiments, in ſhort, almoſt all our affairs in life are regulated. And therefore in this way of handling the queſtion concerning the connexion betwixt the works and the doctrines of our SAVIOUR, I can't be blamed for having talked ſo much of miracles hitherto, without giving a definition of them. Becauſe taking the miracles of JESUS CHRIST in this view, nothing more is neceſſary than to conſider them as certain works that ſhewed ſuch and ſuch power.

It does not belong in the leaſt, to the queſtion, whether theſe works are above, or contrary to, the eſtabliſhed laws of nature; whether ſuperior to human power, as they plainly are; or whether above the power of all created

* *Pray look into an incomparable Diſſertation by* Werinſelſius, *Profeſſor of Theology at* Baſil, de Logomachiis Eruditorum.

agents.

agents. But only what they were; and what power they were ſamples or experiments of. And of this any body may judge; the relation and connexion is ſo conſpicuous and glaring.

The only thing I fear, my friend, is, that you think I have been too tedious; and have taken too much pains to make a connexion evident, that is obvious at firſt ſight. For what can be more clear than what I have been ſo long inſiſting upon? "That he who ſhews by experi-"ments and ſamples, that he has a certain de-"gree of power; really ſhews that he has that "power. And that he who ſhews by a long "train of honeſty and goodneſs, that he is "good, and honeſt, and worthy of truſt; re-"ally ſhews that he is good, and honeſt, and "worthy of truſt."

Nor would I have dwelt ſo long upon this argument; had ever the works of our SAVIOUR been conſidered in this light, by any writer upon the ſubject that I have ſeen.

PART

PART III.

SECT. I.

I Would not however be underſtood, my friend, as if there was no other way of reaſoning from the works of JESUS CHRIST, to prove the truth of the religion he taught. On the contrary, there is another argument which to me ſeems beyond all exception. It runs thus:

" A great number of works that ſhew a " power ſuperior to human power, and to the " eſtabliſhed laws of nature which limit human " power; when produced by a preacher of " good doctrines, as ſigns of the divine appro- " bation; upon a ſolemn appeal to GOD for " theſe ſigns of his approbation: are the moſt " natural ſigns of the divine approbation we " can conceive.

" And it is inconſiſtent with the idea of the " divine wiſdom, and with the order that muſt " obtain in the moral, as well as the natural " world; in conſequence of a divine provi- " dence; to ſuppoſe that ſuch works could be " produced by an impoſtor. For in that caſe " the moſt likely and natural tokens of divine " approbation, we can form any notion of,

would

" would accompany a preſumptive, deceiving " pretender; and thus a cheat would be attended " with the natural and probable marks of truth."

This argument, I think, muſt hold good; becauſe it is not ſo difficult a matter to determine what works ſhew a power ſuperior to human power, and the laws of nature. Experience teaches clearly certain eſtabliſhed uniform laws of nature which we cannot controul, alter, or ſuſpend. " To raiſe the dead; and cure " diſeaſes by a word of our mouth, are, for " example, evidently works of that *kind*."

And tho' we know not the ſpheres of activity of other beings; the laws which limit their faculties: nor, in one word, what degrees of power created beings, ſuperior to mankind may poſſeſs; and conſequently know not what works GOD alone can produce: yet knowing what works are ſuperior to human power; and that theſe works are wrought by a preacher of good doctrines, as ſigns of the divine approbation, upon a ſolemn appeal to the divine approbation; we muſt conclude, that ſuch a preacher really has the divine miſſion he pretends to. Or we muſt ſay, that ſuch works produced in ſuch a manner, are not proper ſigns of the divine approbation. And at the ſame time it is certainly impoſſible to conceive more likely ſigns of the divine approbation; or how indeed the divine approbation can poſſibly ſhew itſelf, but by ſuch ſigns upon an appeal to GOD by the preacher for his approbation.

It is juſtly added to this reaſoning, by way of a corroborative adjunct, that a being of a malignant

nant diſpoſition, would never exert it's power to preach and excite to virtue and piety; nor one of a good diſpoſition to deceive, and thus our SAVIOUR himſelf argues concerning his doctrine and miſſion. *

But this argument has been ſo fully and elegantly diſplayed in all it's force, by ſeveral authors, (Dr *Samuel Clarke* † particularly, and the Biſhop of *Saliſbury* ‖) that there is no occaſion for dwelling longer upon it. Only becauſe I fancy the conſidering the works of JESUS CHRIST as ſamples, adds no inconſiderable force to it; it may not be improper, to take a ſhort view of it in all it's ſtrength, when this additional conſideration is taken into the reckoning. That thus we may have a full view how far the conſidering the works of CHRIST as ſamples reaches.

* Mark iii. 25, &c. † *Demonſtration of the Being*, &c. Part II. ‖ *See* Hoadley's *Tracts*. *See* Grotius de Veritate, *&c.*

SECT. II.

IT conſiſts then of two propoſitions to be examined ſeparately.

" The moral world would be irregular and " diſorderly; if things were not ſo ordered, " that the moſt natural and likely ſigns or " marks of the divine miſſion and approba- " tion, ſhould never accompany an impoſtor.

" But ſigns of power ſuperior to human " power, which are proper and adequate ſam-

" ples, of the power claimed as a divine meſ-
" ſenger, when produced in great numbers and
" unfailingly, by a preacher of doctrines in
" themſelves good and probable; as ſigns of
" the divine miſſion and approbation, are the
" moſt natural and likely ſigns we can conceive
" of the divine miſſion and approbation."

If theſe two propoſitions are true it muſt follow, becauſe ſuch were the works of CHRIST, that he is not an impoſtor, but really ſent of GOD.

SECT. III.

THE idea of order, wiſdom, and providence, neceſſarily infers the truth of the
I firſt: " That the proper marks of the divine
" approbation cannot accompany an impoſtor."
For what could produce greater confuſion or diſorder in the moral world, than the contrary permiſſion. And on the other hand, the reſtraint upon the powers and faculties of beings ſuperior to man, which ſuch oeconomy in the government of intelligent agents ſuppoſes, cannot poſſibly have any bad effect. And, in one word, we muſt either conclude, that there is ſuch a reſtraint, and ſuch a law in the government of the moral world: or we muſt ſuppoſe it impoſſible for GOD, in conſequence of his own adminiſtration, to inſtruct mankind by a miſſion. 'Tis to no purpoſe to ſay, that we can't reaſon about what may, or may not be permitted, becauſe ſins and errors of the groſſeſt kinds are permitted. For there is a manifeſt difference betwixt permitting free agents to miſ-

uſe

uſe their liberty, and commit ſins, which they themſelves, and all other intelligent beings, know to be ſins; or permitting errors to prevail, which all rational beings may clearly ſee to be ſuch; who will but open their eyes, to conſider and examine them: And permitting the criterions and marks of truth to be confounded with thoſe of falſehood; the moſt likely and natural ſigns and tokens of the divine miſſion, and approbation to accompany and atteſt an impoſtor. In the one caſe, free agents are not reſtrained by an overpowering preternatural force, from exerting their natural powers and faculties in a free choice or election. But ſin and vice remain eſſentially and immutably diſtinguiſhable. In the other, truth and error are confounded; impoſture and preſumptuous falſehood carries away with it the proper marks of the divine authority and approbation. And can we ſuppoſe GOD to look on inactive, and ſee his authority trifled with, nay trampled upon, and proſtituted.

In fine obſerve the laws in the natural world, and the order and harmony that reſults from the ſteady, uniform obſervance of them; and judge whether it is not likely, that equal order and regularity muſt prevail in the moral. But how can it be ſo, if it is not an eſtabliſhed law in the moral world, that whatever the powers of any beings are, the evidences of truth ſhould never accompany an impoſtor! Balance the inconveniencies that muſt follow, if there was no ſuch rule; with the conſequences of ſuch a rule; and it will be no difficult matter to ſee on which ſide the probability lies.

But that there is ſuch a law, is a plain conſequence from the divine veracity. "And that "GOD is truth, all nature cries aloud."

'Tis the full and perfect knowledge of truth, order, and beauty; together with the unchangeable love of it; and power incontroulable to execute his deſign, that render a being all perfect. And becauſe the whole of things, as far as we can trace it, is an uniform, conſiſtent ſyſtem, in which truth, harmony, and proportion, are exactly obſerved; and in which all works towards the general good; juſtly may we conclude, that the author of it is a GOD of truth and order; infinitely wiſe and good; as well as almighty. And that the further we are able to pry into his government, by all our ſearching, the more we ſhall be charmed with it's beauty, goodneſs, and perfection. And to ſuppoſe GOD acting inconſiſtently, or departing from truth and order: infinite truth and wiſdom having recourſe to chicanery and fraud; and acting the impoſtor; is a contradiction in terms. And what can poſſibly be called acting contrary to truth; or uſing fraudulent, deceitful meaſures; if giving all the marks of approbation, favour, and protection, to a *lying deceiver*, that can be given to a *Divine Miſſion*, is not really ſo?

SECT.

SECT. IV.

"THAT works which ſhew a power ſupe-
" riour to that of mankind; and to the
" eſtabliſhed laws of nature; and are ſamples
" of the very power claimed; when produced
" by a preacher of good and wholeſome do-
" ctrines to prove his miſſion; are proper ſigns
" of a divine miſſion, is likewiſe certain."

Mankind in all ages hath had that notion; that if GOD did ever reveal himſelf; or ſhew his approbation of any extraordinary teacher, it would be by ſuch ſigns of power as above deſcribed. *That is, by* * *miracles.* And therefore if an argument can be fetch'd in any caſe, from the univerſal conſent and opinion of mankind, it may in this.

Beſides, if a being preaches good doctrines, and gives all evidences of piety and ſincerity, there can be no ground to ſuſpect ſuch a being of claiming a miſſion, that he is not really inveſted with. Is it probable, that any being of an order ſuperior to mankind, would run the riſque of being baffled in his pretenſion to a divine miſſion? And every ſuch being muſt neceſſarily be ſuppoſed to know, as well as we, that GOD hath power ſupreme, infinitely above

* *This is evident from the conduct of antient politicians, who to give the more authority to their laws and inſtitutions, pretended to inſpiration; or an extraordinary intercourſe with ſome revered Deity, or heavenly being,* &c.

all

all created power: And that he can eaſily oppoſe and ruin ſuch a claim: which if it is not true, ſuch a being muſt likewiſe very well know to be moſt preſumptive and impious. Is it not then more likely that any being who can be ſuppoſed to teach good doctrines; and produce extraordinary works to confirm them; if he had no miſſion, would pretend to none; but meerly ſeek his own honour and glory, by the works he wrought and the doctrines he taught? And thus, if I am not miſtaken, our SAVIOUR himſelf reaſons to prove his miſſion. "I came "not, *ſaith he*, to ſeek mine own honour; but "the glory of him who ſent me."

And therefore ſo far am I from thinking, that the divine miſſion and approbation is not proved, if claimed, when all the circumſtances already deſcribed concur: that is, when the doctrines are good in their tendency; the preacher gives indiſputable evidence of ſincerity and good intention; the ſigns ſhew power ſuperior to human power, and to the laws of nature; and are ſamples of the power claimed and the doctrines aſſerted; that on the contrary, I ſhould rather imagine, that the only ſmall ground of ſuſpicion, in caſe of ſuch teaching, would be, if a divine miſſion was not claimed; and if the preacher aſcribed all to his own generoſity and benevolence towards mankind, without pretending to any divine order or miſſion. And yet even in that caſe there would be no ſufficient reaſon to reject ſuch inſtruction. Becauſe ſamples of power neceſſarily prove that power of which they are ſamples: and marks of ſincerity muſt needs be deemed marks of ſincerity. And if a teacher has all the power and knowledge that is

requiſite, in order to the giving us certain information: and at the ſame time gives ſufficient evidence of his honeſty and candor; there can be no ground to miſtruſt him.

But further, if the doctrines preached are not conſiſtent with our natural notions of GOD and virtue; or if the conduct of the preacher is not ſuitable to the claim of a divine miſſion; whatever the works are, we have good reaſon to conclude, that there is no miſſion. In that caſe the cheat is manifeſt. Common ſenſe may eaſily ſee through the maſk, and diſcern the impoſture.

And if there is no criterion, no certain mark neither in the doctrines themſelves, nor the works, nor the behaviour of the preacher, by which the falſhood of the claim can be known: GOD being ſuperior to all created agents, can eaſily refute and baffle the daring, impudent pretender.

And therefore when the conduct of the preacher, and the doctrines themſelves are in every reſpect conſiſtent with our juſteſt notions of GOD and virtue; ſigns of power ſuperior to the laws of nature, which are ſamples of the power claimed, and of the doctrines taught; muſt be held as ſigns of the divine approbation, to prove which they are produced without any controul. Such works are juſtly aſſignable, if not to the immediate hand and operation of GOD himſelf, at leaſt to his order and miſſion. Nor can any ſhadow of reaſon be alleged why they are not: no circumſtance being wanting in them that could render any works more ſo. At leaſt

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it muſt be ſaid, that in ſuch a caſe GOD refuſes not his approbation, becauſe he does not check or contradict the pretender. And in ſuch circumſtances we may ſafely argue, "That ap-"probation not refuſed is given:" for it is only the refuſal by thwarting or oppoſing the pretender, that can evidence it's not being granted. Nay, when theſe very ſigns of ſupernatural power, which God is called upon by the preacher to produce, or allow to be produced, to vouch his authority and miſſion, are actually produced; GOD, by theſe ſigns, if they are likewiſe ſamples of the very power claimed, declares, ſpeaks aloud, as it were, his conſent and approbation. He gives the propereſt ſamples and tokens of it, that we are able to form any notion of.

Becauſe it is by certain ſupernatural appearances or ſigns, that the divine miſſion muſt be declared and ſealed. And to us who know not the boundaries of created power, "Any ſu-"pernatural effects which have all the characte-"riſticks again and again defined, are as fit and "proper ſigns of the divine miſſion, as any "ſupernatural ſigns whatever can be." They have all the marks and characters of ſuch ſigns that can be required, or indeed conceived.

Such appearances, or works, demonſtrate the approbation of ſome being ſuperior to man, and to the laws of nature. They are marks of ſuch an approbation, becauſe they are marks and ſamples of ſuch a power. The queſtion therefore is only, whether they are marks of the divine approbation. And they are marks and ſamples of it, becauſe GOD is appealed to; his miſſion and approbation is claimed; and the works

works are ſamples of all the power claimed as GOD's meſſenger, and of all the doctrines taught.

And a divine miſſion can only be aſcertained by ſupernatural effects produced upon ſuch an appeal; which are adequate ſamples of all the power claimed. For in reality, the only thing that can make any difference as to the fitneſs or unfitneſs of ſupernatural effects, produced without any controul or oppoſition, to vouch the divine approbation, is the relation or affinity, more or leſs, which they have to the doctrines preached, and the particular kind of power or knowledge claimed by the pretended miſſion. And therefore this was what always ſeemed to me of chief account, with regard to the ſigns of power, when a divine miſſion is claimed: the only quality indeed that is requiſite to render ſupernatural effects proper proofs and ſigns of the divine approbation and miſſion; *viz.* "That the "ſigns produced to prove a miſſion, have a "plain connexion with the doctrines taught; "and be ſamples of the very power and know-"ledge claimed as a miſſionary from GOD." And I am indeed ſurprized, that this conſideration hath never been called into the reckoning; in making up the proper evidence of a divine miſſion to teach and confirm certain doctrines.

If the works were not of that kind and nature; one might juſtly call the claim in queſtion; and aſk; "But why no ſamples of the ve-"ry power and knowledge claimed? Why "ſigns of all ſupernatural power, except that "particular kind of it, which the very miſſion

" itſelf ſpecially announces?" Such a defect in the ſigns offered would indeed be no ſlight ground of doubt and ſuſpicion: it being eaſy to GOD to enable his meſſenger to give proper analogous ſamples of the power and knowledge he pretends to particularly, as ſent by him to teach and confirm certain doctrines: and natural and reaſonable to think, that it was the power and knowledge ſpecified by the doctrines, that ought to be particularly exemplified by proper ſigns and experiments. Thus, for example, if a preacher of the reſurrection from the dead, ſhould give ever ſo many proofs of extraordinary ſupernatural power; but did not raiſe the dead; would there not be good reaſon to aſk, But why no ſamples of this power to raiſe the dead? would it not be natural and reaſonable to expect, that this would be the power he would principally chooſe, to exemplify by ſamples and experiments. The reaſoning will hold equally good, with regard to any other doctrines that may be taught by a pretended meſſenger from GOD, and the works he produces to teſtify the truth of his miſſion and doctrines.

But when the extraordinary works ſhew all the power and knowledge that is claimed by the miſſion; all is proved by experiment that is claimed: when the works are ſamples or experiments of the doctrines themſelves, all is confirmed by experiments and ſamples that is aſſerted. And conſequently the whole claim is ſufficiently vouched and exemplified. Or ſamples of power and knowledge are not a proper evidence of power and knowledge. That is, ſamples of a certain quality, are not ſamples of that quality.

In one word, let any one try with himſelf, if he can poſſibly deviſe any other tokens, or ſigns, by which GOD can declare his miſſion and approbation of a preacher, beſides ſupernatural effects produced to teſtify ſuch a miſſion upon an appeal to GOD, for theſe very ſigns of his miſſion and approbation, which are ſigns and ſamples of all the power and knowledge claimed as a miſſionary, and of all he doctrines taught as ſuch, and he will ſoon be convinced, "That "ſuch ſigns are indeed the only language by "which God can converſe, or have any com-"munication with us mortals. The only marks "or tokens by which he can manifeſt his will "and authority. That ſuch works are indeed, "in the nature of things, proper ſamples or "experiments of the divine approbation; or, "that they have all the properties and charac-"ters, that can render ſupernatural effects ſuch "experiments or ſamples. And conſequently "that, according to the natural order, con-"texture, and language of things, and our "common, natural, and neceſſary way of rea-"ſoning from ſamples and experiments in every "other caſe, they muſt be referred to that end, "and held as ſuch." Any thing that is taught us in this manner, concerning the order and connexion of things, is taught us in the very way that we learn every thing we know concerning the order and connexion of things in nature; that is, by ſpecimen or experiment.

SECT. V.

WHEN the ſeveral branches of this argument are laid together, it ſhortly amounts to this:

If a preacher of doctrines in themſelves probable; or at leaſt not inconſiſtent with our juſteſt ideas of God and virtue, to prove his divine miſſion, not only in the general works ſamples of extraordinary ſupernatural power; but alſo gives particular ſamples of every doctrine he teaches, and of every particular kind of power or knowledge he claims, as a teacher ſent of GOD; and all this upon an appeal to GOD that he was indeed ſent of him; and had power from him to work ſuch ſigns to ſhew the divine approbation; the miſſion is certainly proved beyond all controverſy. Or a miſſion may be pretended to; and the moſt likely ſigns of it, we can form any notion of, may accompany an impoſtor without any oppoſition or controul: That is to ſay, a divine miſſion cannot be proved at all; whatever ſigns of extraordinary power are given to eſtabliſh and confirm the pretenſion to it; in ſo great uncertainty are we about the *Regularity* or *Irregularity* of the divine conduct. Or in other words it is to ſay; That it is impoſſible for GOD to inſtruct mankind by a miſſion; becauſe ſuch are the powers he hath given to created agents; or rather ſuch is his adminiſtration, that no certain marks can be given of it. He hath not reſerved to himſelf any ſure unqueſtionable ſigns and tokens, by which

which he can make his will and pleaſure known. He allows the proper, natural marks and credentials of his miſſion to be ſo abuſed and proſtituted, that in reality we can never be certain, when there is a divine miſſion, or not; even tho' all the conceivable ſigns, ſamples, or experiments of it are given that can poſſibly, in the nature of things, be given. And that is indeed to ſuppoſe GOD ſtrangely limited; nay embarraſſed in conſequence of his own government of the world: to ſuppoſe a government which we can hardly reconcile with our ideas of wiſdom, order, and regularity; or with what we know of the divine providence in the natural or moral world.

Or to take the argument in another view, it is to ſay, That when all the power and knowledge that is claimed by the pretended miſſion, is proved by experiments analogous in kind, and proportioned in quantity and moment; all is not proved that is claimed. That when all the doctrines preached, are ſhewn to be true by proper and adequate ſamples and experiments of of their truth; all that is taught is not proved. And that therefore there is ſomething more neceſſary to prove a concluſion, than experiments of that concluſion.

But to ſet this reaſoning yet, if poſſible, in a ſtronger light; let us ſuppoſe it poſſible that GOD may connive at a falſe pretenſion to a miſſion, and ſuffer it to be vouched by the moſt proper marks and tokens of a miſſion, for reaſons incomprehenſible to us; conſiſtently however with his truth and goodneſs in the government of the whole. And this may be, is

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all that ever was, or indeed can be ſaid in oppoſition to the former reaſoning from the divine veracity. Suppoſing therefore this poſſibility, let us ſee how the argument will ſtand upon that footing. All that can be meant by ſuch a *Poſſibility*, is that for what we know it may not be *inconſiſtent* with the good of the whole, to allow ſuch and ſuch credentials to accompany an impoſtor. And in whatever caſe it can only be ſaid, for what we know a thing may not be inconſiſtent; it may be ſaid on the other hand with equal reaſon; for what we know it may not be conſiſtent. Such a poſſibility amounts to no more than the not being able to determine repugnance or non-repugnance. But in the nature of the thing, there muſt be one or other. And therefore when neither the repugnance nor the conſiſtency is capable of proof; the one *may be*, balances the other *may be:* and no regard is to be had to either, in judging of what really happens. Thus then in the preſent caſe, ſuppoſing neither the conſiſtency nor the inconſiſtency determinable; the argument from real appearances muſt run thus: "The doctrines are not inconſiſtent with our "juſteſt notions of GOD and virtue, but on the "contrary in themſelves probable. The con-"duct of the preacher is in every reſpect ſuit-"able to the pretenſion of a divine miſſion. "And the works are ſuch in every reſpect as "can poſſibly be required to vouch a miſſion; "ſuch in every article and circumſtance as "GOD would produce, or order to be produ-"ced, to ſhew his approbation, in caſe of a di-"vine miſſion; according to all the ideas we "are able to frame of proper and fit creden-"tials to teſtify a miſſion. The works are al-

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" ſo proper and analogous ſamples of all the " power and knowledge claimed by the pre- " tended miſſion; or neceſſary to prove the " truth of the doctrines taught by the miſſio- " nary." And therefore according to all appearances there is indeed a miſſion; there is all the proof of the miſſion and of the doctrines that the nature of the thing admits: and more could not poſſibly be done to vouch and aſcertain a miſſion, or to eſtabliſh and confirm the doctrines of the miſſionary. And not to judge according to appearances; or according to the natural tendency and connexion of things; upon the account of a meer *may be* counterpoiſed by a contrary *may be*; would certainly be abſurd, and contrary to our way of reaſoning in every other caſe.

But perhaps, the comparing this argument with another reaſoning ſomewhat of a kind, may help not a little to clear the matter.

That in nature GOD does not multiply cauſes; but works always in the ſame uniform way; producing ſimilar effects by ſimilar cauſes, is a maxim in natural philoſophy juſtly thought to be evident of itſelf; and to ſtand in no need of demonſtration. Simplicity and uniformity are ſo inſeparable from wiſdom according to all our ideas of wiſdom and perfect working. And that GOD, to ſerve any other purpoſe whatſoever; will not allow the ſigns and tokens of his approbation to be produced if he does not approve, ſeems to me as clear; and to ſtand as little in need of demonſtration. For darkneſs is not more contrary to light, than encouraging and confirming error and falſhood

is repugnant to truth and wiſdom; if there is any certainty at all in our cleareſt moral ideas. And what can be called encouraging error and impoſture, if giving all the marks and ſigns of favour, countenance, and protection, to a falſe pretence, that can be given to a real miſſion, is not ſo?

But ſuppoſing it quite indeterminable, whether GOD may conſiſtently with his wiſdom in the government of the whole, multiply cauſes and produce like effects by very different cauſes; yet who would doubt, upon the account of that *may be*; that indeterminableneſs of conſiſtency or inconſiſtency; to refer all like effects to the ſame known familiar cauſe, which is found to be univerſal as far as our examination can reach? 'Tis but judging according to appearances; and according to the nature of things, to refer all like appearances to the ſame known cauſe. And to conclude otherwiſe would be to judge contrary to all we ſee and know; contrary to what nature itſelf points out to us; and calls upon us, as it were, to conclude.

In like manner in the other caſe, ſuppoſing the indeterminableneſs of the conſiſtency, or inconſiſtency with divine wiſdom and truth, of error's having all the marks of truth; or an impoſtor's being honoured with all the marks and credentials of a divine miſſion: yet it is but judging according to the nature of things, to conclude a divine miſſion, when all the marks of a divine miſſion that can be conceiv'd, or deſired, concur: and to conclude doctrines true, of the truth of which all the proper and requiſite experiments are given, that the nature of

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the thing is capable of. And to conclude otherwiſe would be to judge contrary to all appearances; contrary to the plain language of the facts and experiments; contrary to what the very nature and context of the affair calls, as it were, upon us to conclude.

I find the old objection againſt taking the nature of the doctrines into the conſideration, revived by a late author, and great ſtreſs laid upon it: *viz.* "That it involves in a circle."

"Suppoſe, *ſays that author* *, one ſhould aſk "me why I regard a doctrine to day as true, "which formerly I conſidered as indifferent; "I would anſwer, becauſe it is confirmed by "miracles? If it is aſked, why I take the mi"racles to be divine, (for ſuch they muſt be "in order to furniſh a proof) I think my an"ſwer would be ſuitable to Mr *Clarke*'s prin"ciples, if I ſhould ſay, becauſe the doctrine is "poſſible, or at leaſt indifferent."

But let any one read what Dr *Clarke* hath ſaid, and he muſt be ſurprized how any one of ſo diſtinct, clear an apprehenſion as that author ap-

* *I have only ſeen the treatiſe in* French, *and his words are:* "Suppoſez que l'on me demandât, pour quoi regardez "vous aujourdhui comme vraye une doctrine qui vous pa"roiſſoit auparavant indifferente? Je répondrai parce qu'elle "eſt confirmée par des miracles. Si l'on continue a me de"mander, pour quoi regardez vouz ces miracles comme divins? "(car il faut qu'ils ſoient tels afin de pouvoir fournir une "preuve) il me ſemble que ma réponſe ſera tout à fait liée "avec les principes de Mr *Clarke*, ſi je dis, je les regarde "comme de bonnes preuves parce que la doctrine eſt poſſible "ou du moins indifferente.

Traité ſur les miracles par Jacq. Seris, p. 14.

pears to be, could poſſibly miſtake Dr *Clarke*'s reaſoning ſo widely; conſidering how clearly that excellent author always writes. For what the Doctor ſays, is to this purpoſe: That if the doctrine is bad, we may be ſure the miracles are not of God. But if the doctrine is not bad, but rather good, ſuch however as cannot be proved from principles of reaſon to be true; then miracles may prove it's truth. But how do miracles prove the truth of ſuch a doctrine according to the Doctor? Not becauſe the doctrine is indifferent; which would indeed be reaſoning in a circle; but becauſe the doctrine being of itſelf indifferent; if any one ſhould pretend to a miſſion to prove it's truth; and work miracles to atteſt his miſſion; was there indeed no miſſion ſuch a claim would be controuled; ſuch miracles would be overcome and baffled as the Magicians were by *Moſes*. Miracles then prove an indifferent doctrine to be true, becauſe there is reaſon to conclude, from the divine veracity, "That if the doctrines are in themſelves indif-"ferent, miracles without controul would not "attend a falſe pretenſion to a miſſion from "GOD for teaching theſe doctrines."

That is the hinge upon which the Doctor's argument turns. And is it a circle to ſay, that a thing is in itſelf abſurd and conſequently incapable of being proved by teſtimony? Or on the other hand to ſay, a thing is not abſurd, and therefore may be proved by teſtimony? Don't we reaſon in that manner every day, about pretended facts or events? we are only at pains to examine the qualities of the teſtimony offered to prove a thing; when it is in itſelf poſſible or not abſurd. And is not the reaſoning about

doctrines

doctrines preciſely parallel? when it is ſaid, "Such and ſuch doctrines are abſurd, their "falſhood is palpable and evident; and there-"fore they cannot be proved to be true by any "teſtimony?" Or when it is ſaid, on the other hand, That ſuch and ſuch doctrines are not abſurd in themſelves, and therefore may be proved to be true by teſtimony of a certain ſort; or attended with ſuch and ſuch qualities; and miracles, or certain works are neceſſary to render the teſtimony ſuch as may be relied upon? And why then is one of two reaſonings, preciſely parallel, condemned as a ſophiſtical circle; and the other conſtantly admitted without any ſcruple?

In one word; doctrines which are in themſelves conſiſtent, that is, not abſurd; tho' they cannot be demonſtrated from internal principles, or from the nature of things; may however be proved to be true by proper teſtimony; by a ſort of extrinſick evidence: and what renders a certain extrinſick evidence credible, when a miſſion from GOD is claimed, is the abſurdity of ſuppoſing an extrinſick evidence, ſo and ſo qualified, to attend an impoſture or falſhood. And there cannot poſſibly be any circle in ſuch reaſoning, unleſs in the general it is a circle to ſay, "There is no reaſon to call the poſſibility of "the thing in queſtion; and the teſtimony is "unexceptionable; therefore the thing muſt "be true." A way of reaſoning the moſt common, the moſt uſeful; nay, neceſſary in all our affairs of the greateſt concernment in life.

And as there is no ground to accuſe the argument, from miracles, of a circle, when it is

taken upon this footing; ſo there is none to be ſure to charge it with that failure, when the miracles are found to be ſamples of all the power and knowledge claimed, as a meſſenger from Heaven to inſtruct us; or ſamples and experiments of all the doctrines taught, and of all the authority pretended to as a Divine Teacher. And ſuch I think I have already proved the works of JESUS CHRIST to be, with regard to his doctrine and his pretenſion.

SECT. VI.

IT is ſaid that "The great pretenſion of JESUS CHRIST was; That he was the Meſſias propheſied of to the Jews: And that miracles cannot prove prophecies to be fulfilled which were not fulfilled: and that it is only from the fulfillment of theſe predictions in JESUS CHRIST, that his pretenſion can be proved."

This is the topic of late much inſiſted upon. But to ſay the truth, this objection never mov'd me much; nor appeared to me of very great weight.

Becauſe it is obvious, That prophecies cannot be plain and determinate, without producing great confuſion and miſchief in the world: But muſt ever run in a poetical, myſtic, figurative, obſcure ſtile; liable to various and uncertain interpretation before the event, and even after the event: unleſs ſome other circumſtances concur to evince the fulfillment.

And this is the caſe with regard to the antient predictions of the Jewiſh Meſſias. They are, as prophecies muſt neceſſarily be, in an obſcure, figurative, myſtic ſtile. But when we compare the character of JESUS CHRIST, and the circumſtances that attended his appearance in the world, with theſe obſcure prophecies, we ſee theſe prophecies can be applied to him: and ſomething elſe renders the fulfillment of them in him indiſputable; the mighty works † he wrought; together with his moral character. For he applies them to himſelf, claims the character of the Meſſias propheſied of; and at the ſame time ſhewed by his works, and the whole of his conduct, that we had ſufficent reaſon to truſt him.

If the prophecies could not be applied to him in any tolerable conſiſtent ſenſe; that would indeed be a conſiderable difficulty, with regard to his pretenſion. But if they can be applied to him, as clearly as the nature of prophecy admits, and can be applied to nothing elſe, all circumſtances taken in, ſo conſiſtently, and fully: his applying them to himſelf is enough, conſidering what he did to confirm this application. In fine, the only queſtion about this pretenſion to the predicted Meſſiaſhip is, whether from the doctrine, the life, the works of our SAVIOUR, there is not reaſon to truſt his application of certain obſure prophecies to himſelf? When all the alledged prophecies of the Meſſias are laid together; they amount to no more than predictions of an extraordinary teacher, and deli-

† *Obſerve only the anſwer our* SAVIOUR *gives to St* John's *meſſage from priſon*, Matth. xi. 2, *&c.*

verer,

verer, and worker of miracles to appear to the Jews, teaching repentance, the forgiveneſs of ſins, and the reſurrection from the dead. And was not our SAVIOUR ſuch a teacher, ſuch a deliverer; and did he not appear in, and about the time propheſied of, if the meaning of theſe antient prophecies can at all be gueſſed at, or aſcertained with any tolerable degree of probability?

But whatever be ſaid of theſe antient prophecies; I muſt believe, that he who raiſed the dead, had power to raiſe the dead; that he who could make happy and miſerable; cure all diſeaſes; and baniſh all infirmities; had power to make happy and miſerable.

Say therefore that there never were ſuch prophecies of a Meſſias; ſay the arguments fetched from them, were only arguments *ad hominem*; taking advantage of a prevailing notion and expectation, neither of which there is any reaſon to ſuſpect: ſay, in ſhort, whatever you pleaſe upon this head of prophecies; it will ſtill remain certain and indiſputable, "That the doc-
"trines JESUS CHRIST taught were excel-
"lent doctrines; that he gave by the whole of
"his conduct, all the poſſible evidences of ſin-
"cerity and honeſty; and that his works were
"exact and perfect ſamples of the power he
"claimed: the power of raiſing the dead; for-
"giving ſins; and making the good and vir-
"tuous happy, and the vitious and unworthy
"miſerable, in the life that is to come: ſam-
"ples of all the power and knowledge he pre-
"tended to as our Divine Inſtructor; and con-
"ſequently the fitteſt proofs and experiments,

"in

" in the nature of things, of his being ſent of " God, with all the power and authority he " claimed, to inſtruct us in the knowledge of " theſe doctrines which he taught: and that is " all I have undertaken at preſent to prove."

It would be impertinent to inſiſt longer upon this article, when I have nothing new, or that has not been fifty times repeated of late, to offer *.

* *Allow me to recommend to you, upon this queſtion,* Limborchii amica collatio cum Judæo. *No doubt you have ſeen ſeveral excellent treatiſes upon this ſubject, occaſioned by the* Enquiry concerning the Grounds and Reaſons, *&c. thoſe particularly of the learned and worthy Biſhop of* Lichfield *and* Coventry.

SECT. VI.

HAving thus, my friend, anſwered my principal deſign; allow me juſt to add a few remarks upon the Chriſtian doctrine, and the reaſons why Chriſtianity hath been ſo much diſputed, and controverted.

And the firſt and chief reaſon is certainly becauſe natural religion is not ſufficiently underſtood; nor it's principles fully comprehended. If thoſe who repreſent the Chriſtian doctrine in certain lights; underſtood the principles of natural religion; they could not poſſibly entertain ſuch notions of Revealed Religion. And if Chriſtianity was not ſadly miſrepreſented; thoſe who underſtood and believed natural religion, could not poſſibly find fault with Chriſtianity;

or

or at leaſt oppoſe themſelves to it, ſo obſtinately and vehemently.

Was I even in doubt about the being of a GOD; and an over-ruling providence, I behoved to reaſon thus with my ſelf. Tho' there was no GOD; no providence; virtue would ſtill be the intereſt of mankind in general, and of every individual in particular: and if there is a GOD (and that there is all nature cries aloud throughout all her works) the way, the only way, and the infallible way to pleaſe him, and recommend our ſelves to his favour, is by the love and practice of virtue. Virtue therefore is in any caſe my duty, my intereſt; if it is my duty and my intereſt to make myſelf as happy as I can; or if it is my duty and my intereſt to promote the intereſt of ſociety and my kind to the utmoſt of my power; and theſe two are inſeparably joined and connected together, in the nature of things. Virtue and ſocial affection work at once towards the publick good of mankind, and the private happineſs of every particular perſon. Vice and unſocial affection, on the contrary, work unavoidably towards private as well as publick miſery.

Whether therefore there is, or is not a GOD, my duty and my intereſt remains the ſame.

Further, was I in doubt about the Being of a GOD and a providence; the authority of one who ſhewed by his works an extraordinary ſuperiority in nature, an extraordinary power and knowledge, would be ſufficient to remove my doubts, and aſſure me that there is a GOD and a providence; for I could have no reaſon to

ſuſpect

ſuſpect ſuch a teacher, if he ſhewed in all his conduct the greateſt benevolence and compaſſion towards mankind, and taught a doctrine ſo conſiſtent; ſo plauſible; ſo likely of itſelf (to ſay no more of it). And ſo contrary in it's tendency, to any end a deceiver can poſſibly be ſuppoſed to have in view. "That there is a "God and a future ſtate, and that the only "way to recommend to the divine favour and "approbation, either here or hereafter, was by "the practice of virtue, by leading a ſocial ra-"tional life." If ſuch teſtimony or information was offered, all that could be required to render it credible, is an evidence of ſuch knowledge of nature, and the government of the world, as ſhews the teacher of an order ſuperior to man; and in ſuch a ſituation that he may certainly know that truth without any abſurdity. And therefore in this ſenſe it may be ſaid, that even the principles of natural religion, the being of a God and a providence, may be proved by revelation, or taught by a divine miſſion.

But no divine miſſion can poſſibly teach another religion than that which nature and reaſon ſufficiently eſtabliſheth, if we would but hearken to it's dictates. "That the way, the * ſure "way, the only way to pleaſe God, or gain "his approbation, is by the love and practice "of virtue, by imitating his goodneſs and be-"nevolence, in our ſphere, to the utmoſt of "our abilities." As ſoon as we form an idea

* Matth. xii. 30, &c. Luke vi. John xv. 12. James ii. 28. Matth. v. vi. vii. Tit. ii. 11, &c. iii. 6, &c. 1 John iv.

" of GOD; we muſt needs draw this concluſion concerning the way to obtain his favour; " That " the way to pleaſe GOD is not by ſacrifices; " but by works of juſtice, charity, and mercy." To ſpeak in the ſtile of the ſacred writings, or in the words of a pagan poet:

Compoſitum jus faſque animo, ſanctoſque receſſus
Mentis, & incoctum generoſo pectus honeſto.
Hæc cedo ut admoveam templis & farre litabo.

PERS. Sat. ii.

Nature does indeed leave us a little in the dark, not as to the being of a GOD and a providence; that there is no need of an extraordinary teacher to aſcertain; but as to a future ſtate. And therefore it is reaſonable to think, that it muſt be the main end of a divine miſſion, if ever GOD inſtruct mankind in that way; to ſatisfy them fully, as to the truth and reality of a future exiſtence: and when this is done, it muſt infallibly be in this way, ſo often already repeated. " That the practice of vir- " tue is the only way to happineſs in the future " ſtate; and vice that only which can render " miſerable in it." And becauſe it is by JESUS CHRIST that immortality is fully aſcertained; and the terms of acceptance with GOD, and of eternal happineſs, made clear and ſure; well may it be ſaid; " That life and immortality are " brought to light by his goſpel."

This is evidently the account given of a future ſtate in the goſpel of CHRIST; and no other could be received as true, by thoſe who have juſt notions of GOD and natural religion: and

therefore

therefore if certain chriſtian teachers attended to this leſſon of natural religion, they would not place religion, the chriſtian religion, in what they do; or adventure to point out any other road to future and immortal happineſs, but this one: which natural reaſon tells us muſt be the only way to future happineſs, if there is a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments: and chriſtianity ſhews us to be indeed the way to eternal happineſs in that future ſtate, which it alone has ſet beyond all doubt.

And ſeeing this really is the doctrine of the goſpel of JESUS CHRIST; who can find in his heart to oppoſe Chriſtianity; who would not wiſh Chriſtianity was true; who would not naturally be prejudiced in it's favour? every virtuous man certainly would; for it is natural to every virtuous ſpirit to wiſh for honour, glory, and immortality.

Even thoſe who, unluckily for them, had not the inward ſatisfaction of believing, would wiſh well to Chriſtianity for the ſake of ſociety and mankind, and like to ſee ſo noble, ſo comfortable, ſo beneficial a belief prevail univerſally, and univerſally produce the good works which it is the end and tendency of the Chriſtian doctrine to promote among mankind.

Let then Chriſtianity have fair play; let us look for the genuine doctrines of Chriſtianity in the goſpel of our SAVIOUR; and let us diſtinguiſh betwixt them and the vain additions and commandments of men, by which indeed the doctrines and commandments of GOD are rendered of little or no effect; and what is con-

trary to virtue and to piety, and conſequently to Chriſtianity, let us ſet our ſelves together with all our might to deſtroy it. But let none who wiſh well to mankind and ſociety ever think of diminiſhing the obligations to virtue, the great bond of ſociety and human happineſs.

Let us never think of extirpating the moſt agreeable, the moſt cheering belief of a future ſtate; the belief that tends ſo much to promote virtue and goodneſs, and without which there is too much ground to fear very little virtue would remain in the world. Let us conſider before we declare againſt Chriſtianity, even tho' at a time we ſhould happen to doubt, whether men would be better fathers, or better huſbands; better ſons, or better ſubjects; in one word, better members of ſociety, without the belief which true Chriſtianity is deſigned to propagate in the world; for wilfully to endeavour to make men worſe than they are, is certainly the worſt, the moſt malicious office.

Chriſtianity hath not added any thing to our duty, either towards GOD or our fellow creatures, that natural reaſon doth not teach and demonſtrate to be our duty; it only ſets the duties of natural religion, or which our natural light teacheth in a clear light; and ſheweth their full and perfect extent, in oppoſition to falſe and corrupting miſrepreſentations, and urgeth to them by motives and conſiderations the moſt forcible and engaging, which natural reaſon is not able to aſcertain. Certain motives and inducements to ſanctity of life and manners; and means of improving in piety and virtue; together with ſuch gratitude to our SAVIOUR himſelf

ſelf, as ſuch an extraordinary benefactor, well deſerves at our hands; are, properly ſpeaking, all that is *Revealed.* All the duties to GOD, our neighbours, or our ſelves, CHRIST enjoins, are naturally and eſſentially obligatory; and demonſtrable from our natural relation to GOD and our fellow-creatures. For to love GOD and our neighbour is, according to the doctrine of our SAVIOUR, the whole duty of man: The ſum of the commandment: The ſum of the Law and the Prophets. That is, the great end and purpoſe of Revelation, in all it's different periods and appearances; and particularly of his Goſpel, who, (ſo to ſpeak,) came to give the finiſhing ſtroke to Revelation, and in that ſenſe to fulfil and perfect the divine law.

And this puts me in mind to obſerve, that I never met with any objection againſt the morality of the Chriſtian Religion, except one; "That friendſhip was not recommended †." And this not a little ſurprized me; becauſe we have a remarkable example of friendſhip betwixt our SAVIOUR and his diſciple *John.* And at the ſame time that general benevolence is ſtrongly inculcated by Chriſtianity, without which there can be no truly virtuous friendſhip; and which naturally muſt produce friendſhip, when proper occaſion offers of contracting that intimate union of ſouls, emphatically ſo call'd, which can't ſubſiſt but betwixt honeſt hearts; and is better underſtood by feeling than it can be by any de-

† *See* Characteriſticks, Vol. III.

finition *;

finition*; nor need I deſcribe it to you, who duly experience it's ſincere delights.

* *To ſee how naturally true virtuous friendſhip ſprings from the univerſal benevolence Chriſtianity teaches, one needs only read what Lord* Shaftsbury *ſays upon that ſubject in his incomparable treatiſe upon virtue and merit; where one will ſee the difference betwixt generous true friendſhip, and partial friendſhip elegantly deſcribed.*

SECT. VIII.

BUT that we may have a juſt idea of the whole of the Chriſtian Religion; let us take a ſhort view of the means recommended to Chriſtians for their improvement in virtue and goodneſs.

In order to become good, and to make progreſs in virtue, a certain diſcipline of the mind muſt be carefully maintained: our life and conduct muſt be often reviewed and impartially examined. The fancies, the opinions, muſt be catechized, and often called to a ſtrict account. The excellency of virtue, and the folly and unreaſonableneſs of vice; the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of human life; the immortality of our ſouls, and the certainty of future rewards and puniſhments; the Divine Providence and perfections; and, in one word, all the great Principles of religion and morality muſt be often brought to remembrance, duly weighed, and forciby impreſſed: We muſt often think ſeriouſly upon what is right and becoming in this or t'other circumſtance; and what otherwiſe; and whence the difference proceeds. 'Tis thus only

ly that the maſterſhip of the paſſions can be obtained; or the habit of acting rationally and deliberately can be acquired; and that one can arrive at ſuch a force and ſtrength of reaſon as to have ever at command the ſenſe of duty; a clear and juſt apprehenſion of fit and unfit; and to be habitually in a capacity to act in every ſituation, with ready diſcerning, the ſame, worthy and reaſonable part.

This ſelf examination ſo often inculcated by ancient moraliſts, as abſolutely neceſſary to the right government of the mind and paſſions; and living according to the laws of nature and reaſon, is enjoined upon chriſtians * in the ſtrongeſt manner: Private prayer, or private ſerious addreſs to GOD, in conſequence of meditation upon his infinite excellency and perfect adminiſtration, is another exerciſe recommended to chriſtians, in order to their advancement in virtue. And it has indeed been acknowledged by the wiſe philoſophers † to be naturally a proper mean for conquering every unreaſonable appetite, and for ſtrengthening and nouriſhing the rational virtuous diſpoſition ‖.

* *Thus we are often called to think upon our ways; to examine our ſelves; to know what manner of ſpirit we are of.*

† *I ſhall only obſerve upon this head, that* Juvenal *in his tenth ſatire, the argument of which is known to be taken from the ſecond* Alcibiades *of* Plato, *and the doctrine of* Socrates *concerning prayer, ſeems indeed to be laughing at prayer altogether; even prayer for the moral qualities he ſo beautifully deſcribes; as plainly appears from his ſaying,* monſtro quod tibi ipſi poſſis dare; *compared with what he ſays before,* ut tamen & poſcas aliquid: *Yet according to the doctrine of* Plato, *and* Socrates, *praying for, or ſeeking, the moral qualities was one of the beſt natural means of acquiring them.*

‖ *See the 12th chapter of the goſpel of St* Luke, *and compare it with ſeveral other parallel places in the other goſpels.*

We

We chriſtians in our devotions, according to the model ſet before us in the Lord's Prayer (as it is commonly called) and the other directions given us, are to acknowledge with thankful hearts the divine bounty and goodneſs; and to reſign with contentment and approbation, to the divine care, all our outward affairs; and to breath earneſtly after all theſe virtuous qualities which only can render happy and acceptable to our Great Creator, and which it is in our own power to obtain, if we are in good earneſt about it; to confeſs our faults and reſolve upon more diligence, caution and circumſpection in our future conduct; to adore the divine perfections, his benignity and mercy particularly; implore the divine guidance and aſſiſtance; and indulge our ſelves in generous and benevolent wiſhes towards all our fellow-creatures; even thoſe who may have on any account merited our diſpleaſure *.

And ſurely it is not poſſible but the mind muſt be better'd and improved by this exerciſe, if frequently and duly performed. Nothing can contribute more to humanize and ſweeten the temper; to correct and ſubdue all unruly and inordinate paſſions; and to confirm and invigorate every good and generous affection.

But beſides theſe two which Philoſophy hath ever recommended in ſome ſort; and Chriſtianity only ſets in a better and clearer light; there are other means peculiar to Chriſtianity, which are no leſs proper and fit, in the nature of

* *We are particularly enjoined in our addreſſes to* God, *to declare our ſincere forgivance of all offences done to us.*

things,

things, to ripen and improve the virtuous habits: ſuch as the aſſembling our ſelves together the firſt day of the week, in commemoration of our SAVIOUR's reſurrection from the dead; the great foundation-ſtone of our Chriſtian belief; to hear our common faith and common duties explained; profeſs publickly the ſenſe we have of our obligations to love GOD and all mankind; to do juſtice, and to delight in charity and mercy; to forgive injuries, and to walk humbly with GOD; that is, to maintain a full reſignation of mind to infinitely wiſe Providence, with regard to all that we can neither foreſee nor prevent, by our care and anxiety; and a ſincere ſteady inclination to do what depends upon ourſelves wiſely and becomingly; to act a reaſonable part in every circumſtance of life whether proſperous or adverſe. In one word, to profeſs our common faith; and to have the impreſſion of our duties refreſhed and enlivened by publick prayer, praiſe, and inſtruction. This is the end of chriſtian aſſemblies: and when the publick worſhip and teaching are ſuitable to this deſign, or according to this rule, the effect muſt be good. And therefore an excellent author very juſtly obſerves, "That it would have "rejoiced the heart of a *Socrates*, or any of the "antient moraliſts, to have ſeen a publick in"ſtitution for the inſtruction of all men in their "common duties, and in doctrines that have ſo "ſtrict a connexion with virtue and human hap"pineſs." An inſtitution in every reſpect perfectly well calculated to civilize men, and render them wiſer and better: not to mention other leſſer advantages, ſuch as, the reſt it gives to the labouring part of the creation, to the lower ſort of mankind, as well as to the brute animals.

Baptiſm is another chriſtian inſtitution, very proper for gaining the ſame virtuous end. It is a very proper rite for preſerving the memory of the facts upon which the Chriſtian Faith is founded; and pointing out emblematically that purity and ſanctity which is the chief end of Chriſtianity: and is beſides, a chain or link by which Chriſtians are particularly knit together; without any deſign however to confine human love within more narrow bounds, than nature itſelf hath marked out to us.

And the Euchariſt, or Lord's-Supper, is another chriſtian inſtitution, very wiſely adapted to the ſame purpoſes; with this additional advantage, that whereas Baptiſm is adminiſtred regularly to the infants of chriſtian parents, while they are not capable of reflexion; the act of communicating in the ſupper, is an act of reaſon and judgment: an act of our own free choice, in which he who believes the generous condeſcenſion of our SAVIOUR, to ſuffer death for the good of mankind; while he meditates upon ſo noble an example of benevolence and goodneſs, muſt needs feel all the generous and noble affections work within his breaſt, in the moſt improving as well as delightful manner; and form ſentiments and reſolves that can't fail to have a happy and laſting influence upon his temper and diſpoſition.

In all theſe exerciſes however, it is recommended, and indeed is abſolutely neceſſary that reaſon preſide; and that the mind preſerve a certain calmneſs and ſedateneſs; otherwiſe contemplation, admiration, and the warm affections which theſe naturally produce, may run into exceſs;

ceſs; and at laſt deſtroy the balance in which ſoundneſs of mind conſiſts. The caution the excellent philoſopher *Ariſtotle* * gives to young contemplators in Philoſophy, is equally neceſſary in Theology. Too great a warmth of affection is dangerous, and ought to be guarded againſt. And therefore reaſon muſt take care to keep the reins, that it may be able to check and controul, examine and regulate, every action and commotion of the mind.

But not only are theſe means naturally fit and proper exerciſes, under the guidance of a cool and clear judgment, for the cultivating and improving virtue; but beſides, it is promiſed to Chriſtians, that in the diligent uſe of them, they ſhall receive the ſpirit of CHRIST, the ſpirit of Grace; an extraordinary aſſiſtance †.

The excellent biſhop *Tillotſon* hath ſhewn in ſeveral of his ſermons, that we are to underſtand by this aſſiſtance; by the ſpirit of GOD, and the ſeal of the ſpirit: not any extraordinary revelation from the ſpirit of GOD to the minds of good men, telling them in particular, that

* *Nor was this prohibition (as a noble Author obſerves) "of the wondering or admiring habit, in early ſtudents, peculiar to one kind of philoſophy alone. It was common to "many; however, the reaſon and account of it might differ "in one ſect from the other. All Moraliſts, worthy of any "name, forbid the forward uſe of admiration, rapture, or extacy, even in ſubjects they eſteemed the higheſt and moſt divine, to all tyro's in philoſophy; being well apprix'd, that "in religious concerns particularly, the habit of admiration "and contemplative delight, would, by over-indulgence, too "eaſily mount into high Fanaticiſm, or degenerate into abject "Superſtition.* Characteriſticks, Vol. III. p. 37, 202, 203.

† *See St* Luke xlii. 24. *St* Matth. vii. 7, *&c. and ſeveral other texts might be quoted.*

they are the children of God; but ſtrength and firmneſs of mind, generous principles, ſentiments, reſolutions and deſires influencing the mind and all our conduct. And it is well known, that ſeveral of the antient philoſophers* thought a divine *afflatus*, or aſſiſtance, neceſſary, in order to one's arriving to an uncommon pitch of virtue; of fortitude, and publick ſpirit particularly. Nor can this doctrine of aſſiſtance to the virtuous, be charged with any abſurdity, meerly becauſe we cannot point out the way how it is conveyed; unleſs every thing is held for abſurd that we cannot fully explain. It is certainly very eaſy to comprehend what it is for noble, generous ſentiments and principles to work within our minds, in a ſtrong active, vigorous manner, in conſequence of meditation, and other ſpiritual exerciſes; ſo much may be underſtood, or rather felt by experience; and as for the extrinſic conveyance, or aſſiſtance in this caſe, we cannot be more in the dark about it, than we are about the original conveyance or impreſſion of our ideas of ſenſe: for all philoſophers are agreed, that they are conveyed into, or impreſſed upon, our minds by God himſelf, or at leaſt by ſome extrinſic cauſe independent of us: but how, they pretend not to explain.

Certain ways of ſpeaking among Chriſtians, about the ſpirit of God and it's operations, have been confounded with the genuine doctrine of Chriſtianity about aſſiſtance to the virtuous;

* *Several paſſages might be brought from the antient philoſophers to prove this; was that needful to one who is ſo well acquainted with them.* Abſque divino afflatu *(ſays* Cicero) nunquam vir bonus aut fortis.

and

and by this means the true doctrine hath ſuffer'd not a little. But take it by itſelf as it really ſtands; as a promiſe of growth in knowledge, grace, and virtue; a promiſe of firmneſs and ſteadineſs in times of trial and aſſault; to be acquired in the uſe of means which are naturally fit to repleniſh the mind with noble ſentiments; and to confirm and ſtrengthen the good affections. Take the Chriſtian doctrine in this view, and no objection can poſſibly be made againſt it; whatever may be ſaid of certain falſe notions concerning the divine ſpirit and it's workings; whether the produce of melancholy, or of hypocriſy and ſpiritual pride. There is nothing in the thing promiſed, in the fact itſelf unintelligible; and the aſſurance of ſuch aſſiſtance muſt needs be, to all who believe it, a ſtrong inducement to the ſerious purſuit of virtue. It is in the power of all men to be good, if they will but be in earneſt about it; the chief difficulties to be overcome ariſe from evil cuſtoms, from contracted vitious habits. But it is not only in our power to conquer theſe by due diligence and labour; but it is in the power of Chriſtians to do more than others, if they are not remiſs in their endeavours; becauſe of the aſſiſtance promiſed to them. And if the virtues of heathens reproach Chriſtians, and caſt them at a diſtance; it is becauſe they are wanting to themſelves; and do not give due pains to do honour to their maſter and his religion. If they did; they ſhould indeed ſhine as lights in the world; and others ſeeing their glorious example, would give glory to GOD; and fall in love with a religion which produced ſuch uſeful members of ſociety; ſuch noble patterns of every good and praiſe-worthy action. And indeed the lives of heathens ought

to render chriſtians aſhamed; and to excite a noble emulation to excel them: and for that reaſon, What do we more than others? is a queſtian Chriſtians cannot too frequently put to themſelves.

I have not entered upon the enquiry, What is preciſely meant by the ſpirit of GOD; the ſpirit of CHRIST; the HOLY GHOST the comforter; and ſuch like phraſes. An aſſiſtance is plainly promiſed to Chriſtians, and that is the main point. And it is enough to our preſent purpoſe, to have ſhewn, that the works of CHRIST are proper ſamples of his power to impart this promiſed aſſiſtance: and that the proofs he gave of his ſincerity and his ability, are more than ſufficient to ſatisfy us, that we may depend upon his word and promiſe.

I likewiſe forbear enquiring into the meaning of certain ways of ſpeaking, concerning the perſonal dignity and rank of our SAVIOUR: not that there ſeems to me any conſiderable difficulty in the matter; notwithſtanding of all the diſputes upon that head, when ſcripture language is attended to, and all foreign ſcholaſtic terms are laid aſide. But becauſe upon this ſubject, I could not poſſibly do more than tranſcribe from pens I am not able to imitate. His miſſion and relation to Chriſtians, as our inſtructor and SAVIOUR, is clearly told. And how his works, together with the indiſputable evidences he gave of ſincerity, and good generous intention, prove that point; (which muſt be acknowledged to be of main conſequence,) we have already ſeen. One thing however may be added: "That tho' we know not the various

"degrees

" degrees of created agents, and communica-
" ted power; and cannot determine what works
" GOD only can do: yet greater works than
" thoſe of JESUS CHRIST, the raiſing the
" dead particularly we cannot conceive, unleſs
" it is creating: and therefore the works he
" wrought are as proper ſamples as could poſ-
" ſibly be given of his claim to any order or
" rank in being whatever it be: and conſe-
" quently we have ſufficient proof of that claim;
" eſpecially when the evidences of his truth and
" ſincerity are taken into the account; and it is
" likewiſe remembred what ground we have
" ſhewn there is to believe, *That* GOD *would*
" *have controuled and oppoſed him, if his claim had*
" *been falſe or blaſphemous.* 'Tis power and
" knowledge in different degrees, that makes
" the difference amongſt beings; GOD, for ex-
" ample, is ſupreme, becauſe his power and
" knowledge is underived and infinite: And
" power or knowledge of any degree, can only
" be proved or made known by ſamples of power
" and knowledge in that kind and degree."

Thus we ſee that the rules Chriſtianity gives for the conduct of life are excellent. Whatſoever is noble, generous, or praiſe-worthy; it is that, we are commanded by JESUS CHRIST to ſeek after. To give all diligence, to add virtue to virtue, that we may obtain glory, honour, and immortality, is the whole of our chriſtian calling. And how then can we ever induce ourſelves to think, a teacher an impoſtor, who taught ſo pure and perfect a ſyſtem of religion and morals, without any allay of folly or ſuperſtition; and who had no other end in view, but to make men wiſer and better. And after

after all, if he is ſuppoſed an impoſtor, our obligation to live according to the very ſame precepts and rules he gave muſt be acknowledged; if a rational creature is obliged to act rationally; or if there is any difference between wiſdom and folly, reaſonable and unreaſonable. For virtue is certainly the intereſt of every particular perſon, as well as of mankind in general, even when this world only is taken into the account; and much more muſt it be owned to be ſo, if any regard ought to be had to another life; to which every thinking perſon will reckon himſelf obliged to have regard, if the notion cannot be clearly demonſtrated to be a dream without any foundation. And that was never yet pretended.

SECT. IX.

BUT becauſe there are ſome obſcure paſſages even in the goſpels; tho' that is eaſily accounted for; another remark that I would make, is; That there cannot poſſibly be any article of faith about what is obſcure and diſputable as to it's meaning in the chriſtian revelation, but this one; "That it is obſcure and "diſputable; and GOD can never require of "us to underſtand that which is not made plain." To throw away or deſpiſe what is clear, and evidently uſeful in any work, becauſe there are other things we can't make any certain ſenſe of, is certainly moſt unreaſonable. And for thoſe who are agreed together in the belief of what is plainly told, to fall out, and treat one another rudely, becauſe of different opinions about what is obſcure, is no leſs ſo. And yet would but chriſtians

chriſtians remember this, the controverſies that divide them ſo much, would ſoon be at an end; or at leaſt all diſputes among chriſtians would be carried on and managed in a moſt amicable, agreeable manner. Whatever obſcurity there may be elſewhere, there is none at all in the precepts, which are of indiſputable obligation. Charity, benevolence, moderation and humanity, are clearly enjoined: and to the practice of theſe virtues it is, that eternal life and happineſs is as clearly promiſed. Is it not therefore very odd and ſurprizing that chriſtians who conſent in this; that the practice of theſe duties is the chief thing; and that the doctrine of a future ſtate and a reſurrection from the dead, is the main doctrine of Chriſtianity, the doctrine of chief importance; ſhould not reaſon with one another about the meaning of certain places in the ſacred writings, which they both own to be of difficult interpretation, with all calmneſs, good nature, and modeſty?

In the mean time nothing can be more certain than that what is not plainly and diſtinctly revealed to us, and of eaſy certain interpretation, can only be deſigned for an exerciſe of charity and friendly conference or diſpute.

To believe that what is obſcure is of vaſt importance, and that our ſalvation depends upon the hitting the meaning rightly; is a notion contrary to all our natural ideas of GOD and his divine perfections; it is ſuppoſing a divine revelation a ſnare, or ſphinx. If therefore there is any thing obſcure and difficult in the ſacred writings; let thoſe who have time and leiſure endeavour to explain it. And if men of learning

differ in their ſentiments; let them not however tear and devour one another on that account as wild beaſts: but remember that love is the end of the commandment: and that tho' one ſhould have the gift of interpretation; nay the gift of working miracles and of prophecying; yet if he hath not charity *all is vain and of no value. God is love and he that is of God is love.* If it is ſaid; that after all there cannot be much virtue or merit in the faith of the common-people, becauſe they cannot poſſibly philoſophize about miracles, and their connexion with doctrines: I anſwer, that I am far from thinking that it is belief, however rational and well founded, that can recommend to God; it is only a good life and converſation. And if the faith of the common-people produce this effect, they will be accepted of God, becauſe of their virtue, piety and goodneſs, without regard to the grounds upon which their belief is founded. But the great advantage of Chriſtianity is; that it is able to give rational ſatisfaction to the philoſopher, about points of the greateſt importance; and at the ſame time to excite the inferior herd of mankind to the practice of virtue, in the way that they are moſt capable of being moved and influenced. And yet however difficult it may be to make the common-people underſtand the bulls of popes, the creeds of councils, a metaphyſical catechiſm; it is not ſo hard a taſk to make the meaneſt mechanic comprehend the genuine doctrines of *Chriſtianity*, and their connexion with the works of Christ. Nor is the hiſtorical evidence, when repreſented in a ſimple familiar light, as it may eaſily be, above the vulgar reach. Every body reaſons about things of the ſame kind every day.

If you aſk me, my friend, how an unbeliever, living among chriſtians, ought to be treated by chriſtians? I anſwer; with all tenderneſs, compaſſion, and good will, for ſo humanity requires, ſo Chriſtianity teaches; and that is the only way to bring in thoſe that are without.

If you aſk me, what may be his fate hereafter? I anſwer, "Every man will be judged "by his works." And one who is conſcious to himſelf of no prejudice againſt Chriſtianity, that he has examined it fairly, and yet can't help doubting; if at the ſame time he leads a virtuous and regular life; has nothing to fear; ſo Chriſtianity as well as reaſon teaches me. Virtue is the main thing, the end of believing; and the beſt and worthieſt part that one can act in matters of opinion and belief, is to examine impartially. This is an eternal immutable truth: "That he who feareth GOD, loveth mercy, "and worketh righteouſneſs, will be accepted "of GOD; who hath no reſpect of perſons, "but will judge every one according to his "works *." But no unbeliever, who loves mankind and ſociety, will take it amiſs to be put in mind; that whatever his opinion may be of the evidences and grounds of the Chriſtian Religion; it is doing a real miſchief to mankind and ſociety, to endeavour to deſtroy or diminiſh the faith and perſuaſion of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. Οὐχ ὁρᾷς ὅτι τὰ πολυχρονιώτατα καὶ σοφώτατα τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ, πό-

* *And this is what GOD hath taught us by JESUS CHRIST*, Acts x. 34, &c.

λεις καὶ ἔθνη, θεοσεβέσταλά ἐστι, καὶ αἱ φρονιμώταις ἡλικίαις, θεῶν, ἐπιμελέσταις.

ΞΕΝΟΦΩΝΤΟΣ
ΑΠΟΜΝΗΜΟΝΕΥΜΑΤΩΝ
Κεφ. δ'. ις'.

In my next I will give you my ſentiments concerning the hiſtorical evidence of the works of JESUS CHRIST; and at the ſame time my opinion of the antient Magic, ſo much talked of. In the mean time it is obvious, "That "thoſe who were eye-witneſſes to the works of "our SAVIOUR, had the ſame evidence for "the truth of his pretenſion, That thoſe have "of the ſkill of a painter, who ſee him draw "a fine picture; or of the truth of a concluſion "who ſee the experiments performed, from "which it naturally and neceſſarily follows."

I am, &c.

QUERIES.

QUERIES.

QUERY I.

WHETHER ſamples of a certain power, do not prove that power: Or if any thing elſe is neceſſary to prove a certain power, beſides ſamples of that power: ſamples analogous in kind, and approportioned in quantity or moment?

And in conſequence of this, whether ſamples of a power to raiſe the dead, do not prove a power to raiſe the dead; and whether ſamples of a power to deliver from all kind of diſeaſes and infirmities, do not prove a power to deliver from all kind of diſeaſes and infirmities; and whether ſamples of power to confer certain qualities and bleſſings, do not prove power to confer theſe qualities and bleſſings?

QUERY II.

WHETHER the principal, if not all the doctrines of CHRIST are not assertions of his having power to raise the dead, and deliver from miseries; and confer blessings; to deliver from such kind of miseries, and confer such kind of blessings as his works were proper and natural samples or experiments of? And what sample or samples are wanting, to make the evidence of his having any power he claimed by his doctrines, full and compleat?

QUERY III.

WHETHER it is more natural and reasonable to think, that GOD would controul the power of any Being who pretended a mission from him which he had not; and not suffer him to produce all the extraordinary works he appealed to, as signs of the divine mission and approbation? Or that GOD would let one appeal to him for his approbation; and give all the evidences and signs of it, to which he appeals as proofs, without any check or controul; full samples of all the power and knowledge he pretended to as a divine missionary? which of these two conclusions is most consonant to our notions of order and wise administration; our natural conceptions of GOD; and to what we know of the divine government of the natural or moral world?

QUERY IV.

WHETHER an uninterrupted courſe of honeſty, goodneſs, faithfulneſs, and benevolence, be not ſufficient to create truſt? And whether there was any thing in the conduct of JESUS CHRIST, that could beget diffidence and miſtruſt; or any thing wanting to put his honeſty, ſincerity, and good intention beyond all doubt?

QUERY V.

WHICH of the doctrines of our SAVIOUR has not a direct tendency, and powerful influence, to excite and encourage to the practice of piety and virtue; and what is wanting to render the doctrine of our SAVIOUR, a compleat ſyſtem of religion and morality, in point of precepts, motives or means: what in point of duty, that reaſon does not demonſtrate to be duty; what in point of motive, that is not in itſelf probable tho' not certain; or what in reſpect of means that is not fit and proper in the nature of things, to improve and promote virtue and goodneſs to the higheſt degree of perfection human nature is capable of?

QUERY VI.

WHETHER therefore abſtracting from the truth of Chriſtianity, a better publick doctrine can be deviſed; whether mankind would live more comfortably and virtuouſly without the belief of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, and the other motives Chriſtianity furniſheth to the practice of benevolence and righteouſneſs; and conſequently whether it is a kind office to mankind to endeavour to

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weaken that belief; or whether it is not the part of a good member of ſociety, and an honeſt man, to conſider well before he publiſhes to the world his ſingular notions, whether the promulgating them may not have a bad effect; contribute to leſſen the regard to virtue, or at leaſt the reſtraints from vice?

QUERY VII.

WHETHER the works which were performed by JESUS CHRIST, to evince the truth of the doctrines he taught, are not a natural, proper and full proof of their truth in the ſtricteſt and moſt philoſophical ſenſe of proof or evidence; ſince his works bear the ſame relation to his doctrines, as ſigns or ſamples of their truth, that any Experiments in philoſophy bear to the concluſions juſtly inferred from them; or in other words, ſince they are ſigns of their truth in the ſame ſenſe that experiments or ſamples of gravity or elaſticity, for inſtance, are ſigns of the reality of theſe properties?

QUERY VIII.

WHETHER that kind of proof or evidence can be ſaid to be above the reach of any one, upon which even the loweſt and moſt ignorant of mankind daily reaſon and act in many inſtances: and whether all degrees of men do not reaſon and act every day upon the evidence or proof, which ſigns and ſamples afford of that quality, natural or moral, of which they are ſigns and ſamples?

The evidence therefore, upon which the truth of Chriſtianity depends, is at the ſame time a ſtrictly philoſophical unexceptionable evidence, and an evidence that is obvious to every capacity, nay familiar to every one.

Theſe

These Queries serve to give a short view of the chief design of this ENQUIRY; and are humbly offered to the serious consideration of all who pretend to be *Free-thinkers*, that is, accurate, impartial enquirers after truth: for free-thinking, in this only just and true sense of it, is man's duty and glory.

APPENDIX.

I AM satisfied that I have clearly proved that the Miracles of JESUS CHRIST are a proper and full proof of his doctrines in the strictest and most philosophical sense of proof or evidence; and that the preceding ENQUIRY contains as full an answer to all that is said by the *Moral Philosopher* about Miracles in his first or second volume, as if it had been written on purpose to refute his false reasoning, tho' it was published several years before that performance appeared. Yet, in order to prevent as much as it lies in my power any one's being misled by that author, I shall here subjoin a chain of reasoning which appears to me absolutely certain, that necessarily leads to a conclusion about Miracles and the evidence of Christiantiy diametrically opposite to his.

1. All truths which directly tend to encourage and promote the practice of virtue are moral or divine truths; truths conducive to the purification and

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moralizing of our affections and tempers; truths that ſtrongly excite to the imitation of the divine moral perfections, and that by conſequence have an immediate tendency to improve our minds to the higheſt pitch of moral perfection we can attain to; or, in other words, into a likeneſs to the divine nature: All ſuch truths are moral, religious, or divine, in reſpect of their tendency.

This ſeems to be a ſelf-evident propoſition, and is indeed acknowledged to be true by the *Moral Philoſopher*.

2. To every one who thinks well of human nature and of our Creator, or who is perſuaded that man is endowed by his Maker with powers, faculties, diſpoſitions, and affections, that are capable of being improved by our own diligence and application to a very noble pitch of moral perfection; which is the firſt principle, or rather the baſis of natural religion: To every one who is thus perſuaded, every propoſition concerning the preſent or future ſtate of mankind and virtue, that is not only conſiſtent with that perſuaſion, but directly tends to animate, ſupport, perfect, and comfort true virtue, muſt at firſt ſight appear very probable upon that very account.

Such a conſiſtency and tendency neceſſarily conſtitute a very conſiderable degree of probability. Theſe not only gain the affection of every good mind, and excite an earneſt deſire that ſuch propoſitions may be true; but they neceſſarily diſpoſe every unbiaſſed underſtanding to aſſent to them, in conſequence of their agreement with other known truths. In other words, propoſitions that unite and tally with other known truths by ſo doing make a coherent ſyſtem that is wonderfully perſuaſive as well as pleaſing to the mind. Thus, for inſtance, to one who believes the fundamental principle of natural religion juſt mentioned, this following doctrine muſt appear

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very probable, on account of its immediate tendency to promote and encourage virtue, and its exact agreement with that principle; namely, "That "God will graciously forgive the repenting, that "is, the reforming sinner, who, forsaking vice, se-"riously sets himself to make progress in virtue; "and that such persons shall be made happy in a "future state, in proportion to their advances in "true reformation of heart or manners." This comfortable doctrine, which by no means gives any encouragement to vice, but on the contrary is the strongest inducement to repentance and reformation, so exactly tallies with our natural notions of God and of virtue, that at first sight every one who hath just apprehensions of the Deity must be powerfully disposed and inclined to assent to it; they must think it very probable.

3. Now could this proposition be proved to be true from the consideration of the divine perfections, that is, could it be inferred by necessary consequence from any known truths concerning God, it would in that case be a demonstrable truth. It would then be no longer only a probable one; it would be as certain a conclusion as any other in science. So intimately related and strictly connected are all truths, that, I believe, there are no truths concerning God's providence and virtue, that are not in the nature of things capable of demonstration, that is, capable of being inferred by scientifical reasoning from certain other truths. But truths may in the nature of things be capable of demonstration, and yet not be discoverable by certain beings, but be absolutely above their reach in the scientifick way of knowledge. And whether certain truths, as for instance that just mentioned concerning the forgiveness of sins, &c. be capable of scientifick demonstration with respect to us in our present state, or not; yet such truths may be proved to be true

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by another kind of evidence diſtinct from that which is properly called ſcientifical deduction, when the concluſion is inferred from principles that neceſſarily imply or involve its truth; but an evidence that is withal unexceptionable and truly philoſophical; or by a very ſatisfactory and abſolutely neceſſary way of reaſoning not only in philoſophy, but in all affairs of the higheſt concernment in life.

4. For if any Philoſopher of good reputation ſhould tell one he knew how to reduce by neceſſary conſequences all the motions and appearances of the heavenly bodies to the law of gravity, with many effects of which law every one is familiarly acquainted; would not every one, who is ſatisfied with regard to the wiſdom of the Author of nature, and the ſimplicity, unity and beauty of all his contrivances and adminiſtrations, and who is at the ſame time convinced of the capacity and integrity of the Philoſopher who tells him ſo, be perſuaded of the truth of his aſſertion, and acquieſce in it with great complacency and aſſurance upon that very account, in the ſame manner that one, without underſtanding the principles of phyſick, chymiſtry, painting, architecture, or any other art whatſoever, reſts ſatisfied that he may ſafely employ one who hath given proper evidences of his ſkill in the art he profeſſes, and of his integrity in his way of dealing with mankind? Do we not reaſon, ſatisfy ourſelves, and act with great confidence and aſſurance of mind every day, in a thouſand inſtances, in that very manner?

5. And by parity of reaſon, if any Being gives us a fuller account of GOD's providence and virtue, with regard to this preſent ſtate of mankind, or to a ſucceeding ſtate, than we have yet attained to, or are perhaps able to attain, by the conſideration of truths we know in the ſcientifick way; an account that exactly tallies or makes a coherent ſyſtem with the

the principles of natural religion we already know; provided the Being, who gives us ſuch an account, does at the ſame time give undoubted evidence of his integrity and good intention, and of his capacity to inſtruct us in what he pretends to inſtruct us, in conſequence of his larger and fuller knowledge of nature; would we not in ſuch a caſe have the ſame evidence for theſe truths that we have in the caſe of the Philoſopher juſt mentioned, or that we act upon in the affairs of the greateſt importance every day?

6. The argument in ſuch a caſe muſt run thus. This Being, who aſſures us that, having a fuller knowledge of nature than we, he is ſure that certain propoſitions are true, which propoſitions are very comfortable to virtue, and far from being inconſiſtent with what we know, are exceedingly agreeable to all we know: This Being having given full evidence of his larger knowledge of nature than we have, and full evidence of his integrity, we can have no reaſon not to truſt to and depend upon the certainty of his information or aſſertions. He hath proved himſelf honeſt and worthy of credit, and capable of inſtructing us; and therefore not to truſt to his informations is to doubt either of his honeſty or of his capacity; that is, to doubt of what by the ſuppoſition is fully proved: The only queſtion therefore, when ſuch inſtruction is offered, is, whether the Inſtructor gave full evidence of his capacity to inſtruct, and of his integrity? Now what that evidence muſt be, I think, hath been ſhewn at full length in the preceding diſcourſe.

7. There may be therefore an *extrinſick evidence* or proof that ought to ſatisfy us, even with regard to truths in their nature capable of demonſtration in the ſcientifick way, or by *intrinſick evidence*, before we attain to it, or abſtracted from it. And whatever belongs to that *extrinſick evidence*, or tends to make it up, is a part of it, or a ſtep in that kind of reaſoning.

ſoning. Certain works, whether they are called *Miracles* or not, or however *Miracles* may be defined, that make up an *extrinſick evidence* of truths, belong to that kind of evidence, and are as proper ſteps towards the concluſion in that way as principles, from which a concluſion is intrinſically deduced, are with regard to *intrinſick* or *ſcientifick evidence*. To ſay works, from which the *extrinſick evidence* of truths is deduced, have no relation to theſe truths, is to ſay, "That the parts that make "up a reaſoning or an evidence do not belong to it." And to ſay there can be no *extrinſick evidence* of truths is to ſay, "That a Being, who knows more "of nature than we, is not capable of informing us "of what we do not know, and of giving us good "reaſon to truſt to him." But what is the proper evidence in ſuch a caſe? Is it not evidence of honeſty and evidence of knowledge ſufficient to inſtruct us? And how can honeſty be proved but by evidences, that is, ſamples of it? Or how can a fuller knowledge of nature be ſhewn and proved but by full, that is, proportioned ſamples and ſigns of that fuller knowledge pretended to? that is, in the ſame way that any kind or degree of knowledge pretended to is proved, by ſamples analogous to it and proportioned in quantity or moment.

8. So that of neceſſity the queſtion concerning the inſtruction in the nature of GOD's providence and a future ſtate, offered to us by JESUS CHRIST, comes to be, "Whether he gave a ſufficient *extrinſick* "*evidence* of the truth of his inſtructions, ſufficient evidence of his goodneſs and integrity, and "ſufficient ſamples of the knowledge neceſſary to "inſtruct us in theſe matters?" It comes then directly to this queſtion, "What did his conduct and "works prove? Did they prove goodneſs and ſufficient knowledge? Are they full and proper "ſamples of his honeſty, and of his ſufficient know-

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" ledge to inſtruct us; ſamples proportion'd to his " claim in kind and moment?

9. All the reaſoning in the *Moral Philoſopher* about *Miracles* really depends upon admitting this manifeſt abſurdity, " That ſamples proportioned in " kind and moment to a claim of knowledge or " power are not proper proofs of that claim." For if that be falſe, it muſt be abſurd to ſay, that *Miracles* or works can never be a proof of doctrines, ſince works not only may be ſamples of knowledge ſufficient to inſtruct in certain truths; but there can be no other proof given of knowledge but by ſamples, and there can be no other ſamples given but by works. Let him therefore ceaſe to tell us, that works can never be a proper proof of doctrines, and attempt to ſhew, if he can, that CHRIST's *Miracles* or works were not a proper proof of the knowledge he claimed by pretending to aſſert the truths he taught: And that he muſt do, by proving either that his works were not analogous to it in kind, or by proving that they were not proportioned to it in moment; in order to which he muſt prove, that ſamples of raiſing the dead, of delivering from evils of various ſorts, and of conferring bleſſings of many different kinds, bodily and mental, are not analogous proportioned ſamples of knowledge and power to raiſe the dead, deliver from miſery, and make happy; which is the ſame attempt preciſely, as it would be to prove that ſamples of ſkill in an art are not ſamples of ſkill in that art.

10. Let me add to what hath been ſaid, that truths, which are taught us in this manner, are taught us in a ſupernatural, and yet in a natural way. They are taught us in a ſupernatural way, becauſe they are taught us by a Being, who hath a fuller, a more comprehenſive knowledge of Nature than we. And yet they are taught us in a natural way, for information in truths,

by a Being, of whoſe capacity of informing us, and integrity, we have no reaſon to doubt, is a moſt natural, common, familiar, ſure, ſatisfying and neceſſary way of receiving information. That is to ſay, ſuch information is ſupernatural with reſpect to its Origin or Author; but natural in reſpect of the evidences given of its credibility: Evidences by ſamples being a natural evidence in any proper ſenſe of natural Evidence. And indeed, tho' our Inſtructor may be ſupernatural, yet we cannot be inſtructed by any other but natural evidence.

If ſuch information be given by a Being authoriſed, commiſſioned, or ordered by GOD to inſtruct us, it is in that caſe divine information; that is, it is information given us by GOD's ſpecial command and appointment. But the capacity of our Informer to inſtruct us muſt be proved by his works, in the ſame way and manner, whether he pretends to come from GOD or not. And his pretenſion to come from GOD, depends abſolutely for its evidence upon the ſame evidences of candour, honeſty and good intention, neceſſary to gain our credit, whether he pretends to come from GOD or not. So that with regard to ſuch information, whether the truths of which we are ſo informed, be capable of demonſtration in the ſcientifick way or not; whether they can or cannot be proved to be true by intrinſic evidence; and whether, the teacher pretends to be commiſſioned by GOD or not; the only queſtion is, whether he gave ſufficient evidences of honeſty and of the knowledge pretended to. And there cannot poſſibly be any reaſon to diſcredit an information, if it really be attended with all the proper evidences of knowledge and integrity; that is, with all the proper evidences of the qualities neceſſary to render an inſtructor credible and worthy of truſt.

To ſum up all therefore, the *Moral Philoſopher*, when he aſſerts, that *Miracles* cannot make a Proof with

with reſpect to Doctrines, muſt aſſert, that a Being, who knows more of nature than we do, is not capable of informing us concerning ſeveral truths that we do not know: or that no works any ſuch pretender to inſtruct us, may or can produce, can poſſibly amount to a proof, either of his ſkill to inſtruct us or of his integrity. It would be trifling to ſay, works can never make an intrinſick evidence; for truths capable of intrinſic evidence may be ſatisfyingly proved to be true by ſuch an external evidence as hath been deſcribed, abſtructedly from all conſideration of their intrinſic evidence: and works in the ſenſe defined, do really make up the intrinſic evidence of the credibility of the information; or the intrinſic reaſons of giving credit to, and putting full confidence in our Informer. All I have been aſſerting is indeed ſelf-evident, namely, "That ſamples and ſpecimens of doctrines, are "proper proofs of doctrines:" and that works, which are ſamples of the credibility of an information concerning facts or truths, are proper proofs of that credibility, or conſtitute intrinſick marks and evidences with regard to that credibility. "For if theſe "propoſitions be true, it neceſſarily follows, that *Mi-*"*racles* may be a proof of Doctrines; and that "CHRIST's *Miracles* were a full and proper proof of "his Doctrines." In truth, what we are called upon to prove by thoſe gentlemen, who aſſert, that no *Miracles* can be a proof of doctrines, are truths no leſs plain and obvious than that two and two make four; ſuch as that there is no reaſon not to truſt to an informer, that ſhews himſelf worthy of truſt and qualified to inform us: And that as experiments of elaſticity and gravity, prove elaſticity and gravity to be real properties or affections of matter; or as ſpecimens and experiments of ſkill in phyſick, or any other art, prove ſkill in that art of which they are ſpecimens, ſamples or experiments; ſo ſpecimens, ſam-

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ples and experiments of power to raiſe the dead, aſſiſt the virtuous and make them happy, prove power to do it.

I ſhould not have repeated the ſame plain ſimple truths ſo often, had not certain writers repeated the ſame objections, over and over again, without ſo much as giving them a new colouring. And I do declare, that if any one ſhall convince me of the falſity of any ſtep in the foregoing reaſoning, I will return him thanks, tho' at the ſame time, ſuch is my opinion of the Chriſtian doctrine, that I can never perſuade myſelf not to wiſh it true; or not to wiſh it were *univerſally believed*, that it might be *univerſally practiſed*.

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